



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

POOR ZEPH



600064780V





**P O O R   Z E P H**

**A N D**

**O T H E R   T A L E S .**

**V O L . I**



# POOR ZEPH

AND

## OTHER TALES

BY

F. W. ROBINSON

AUTHOR OF

"GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

18, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1880.

*All rights reserved.*

251. f. 635.



**LONDON :**  
**PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.**  
**BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.**

TO

JOSEPH KNIGHT, ESQ.,

*In Friendly Greeting.*



POOR ZEPH.

VOL. I.

B





# POOR ZEPH.


---

## CHAPTER I.

### THE GRANDISON ROOMS.

THEY were rooms that had seen better days and known better company. Time had been when society patronized the Grandison Rooms, and folk whom the world knew, and whom Court Guides recognized, came to classical concerts and evening conversaziones here, and drove away again weary and depressed. When fashion drifted further west, and larger rooms in more brilliant thoroughfares took all the shine

that was left from the Grandison, the neighbourhood became shady and dubious by degrees, and the poor old stucco edifice in Frisk Street, Soho, grew more shady and dubious to match. Everybody came to grief who speculated in the Grandison, because nobody would come to see everybody's entertainment, no matter of what its merits might consist. Dioramas collapsed by scores at the Grandison Rooms, which were the home, or rather the family vault of dioramas for many long-suffering years, concluding with the tragic episode of a bankrupt exhibitor blowing his brains out one morning over the grand piano which a relentless lessee had impounded. Private theatricals had a turn at the Grandison Rooms, and failed to secure an audience; an organ-builder lost his money and his head over them; a furniture emporium sprang to light here, and went suddenly out again, with all the furniture of the depositors; finally, a man who had been a publican, and had



relations in the ballet, started the Grandison as a dancing academy, and, to the amazement of the neighbours, held his ground for years, and, in the face of much scandal, and ill-report, and enmity, existed after his own small fashion upon the profits of his speculation.

The Grandison Rooms became something more than the shadow of a name again, although society had turned its back on them for ever. Knowing clerks about town, lively young Jews and Jewesses, with Saturday evenings to themselves, skittish milliners and dressmakers from the large establishments in the vicinity, the drapers' young men, the French hairdressers and French waiters and cooks for which Soho is famous, all knew the Grandison, spent their hardly-earned money there, and kicked up their heels to a wheezy band of four which played dance music in a little gallery.

The Grandison had no dancing licence, but evaded the law with a cleverness that



reflected credit on Smiles the proprietor, who, report said, had not always been successful in dodging that great institution, but had bought his experience dearly once or twice. The Grandison was ostensibly and simply a dancing academy, where it was supposed that only annual subscribers were allowed to introduce their friends, who paid eightpence for the privilege on quadrille nights, which were three a week in the winter season, and well attended as a rule. Smiles did his best to keep the Grandison a select establishment, it must be asserted. Disreputability in silks and satins had flaunted its way hither, and been told politely that it could not be admitted on any pretence whatever ; and the fast man—that is the man who had come for a lark, and, failing in his lark, had gone in for a row—had been quickly pitched into the street, or handed over to the policeman, at the first sign of his overstepping the bounds of that

propriety for which the Grandison aimed to be distinguished.

There was no dancing in hats or bonnets at the Grandison, no smoking allowed, save in the gentlemen's room upstairs, where report said card playing had been seen at times for a trifle more than nominal stakes. There was no boisterous fun, shrill laughter, or unseemly actions, nothing save the light and airy flirtations patent to all dancing shops high or low, and a trifle more evident at the Grandison, where life was distraction and reaction from a day's hard work. The academy was considered "a proper sort of place" by its habitués, who behaved themselves creditably, danced vigorously, and perspired much for eightpence, going steadily through the programme as a duty, and with a fixed intention to have money's worth for money expended. Men of the Cremorne and Argyll types, scouts from the grand army of prowlers, dropped in now and then,

but voted the whole thing slow, and went away again as from a place of entertainment beyond their comprehension, a section of a world on the border-land of good and harm, which they had not time to study.

There were two strangers puzzled in this way in the month of an April of two years ago. They had been attracted by the noise from the open windows of the Grandison, had paused in the street and in their short cut westward to listen, had asked a few questions of the aborigines, had gone in laughing and jesting at their adventure, and were now standing at the door of the shabby ball-room, looking curiously and critically at the dancers, who regarded them as intently in their turn.

"Swells," whispered the girls, and "Stuck-ups," muttered the men, whose attention had been arrested.

"An odd lot this, Frank," commented the elder stranger, a grave, almost stern-looking man of five and twenty years of age.

"Wait a moment or two, Dudley," was the reply of a handsome young fellow, faintly flushed with wine, for he and his friend had been dining at the club, and dining heavily; "this is a novelty, and amuses me."

"Giddy folk are easily amused," said the other, sententiously.

"I am not giddy."

"You are young, and life bewilders you."

"What are they all?" asked Frank, thoughtfully.

"The working classes in their best clothes."

"Respectable?"

"I should say so—most of them," added Dudley, with a reserve.

"The girls are tolerable, but the men are dreadful," muttered the younger man, still proceeding with his criticism.


"Ah! yes," said Dudley, wearily, "that's the general rule. How long do you think of remaining?"

"A quarter of an hour or so, if you don't mind. This is what the world would call a spree."

"I don't quite see it. I will go into that ante-room and wait for you," said Dudley, wearily; "it may be possible to get seltzer there."

"Stop and see the dancing," urged the other, greatly interested in the scene. "By Jove, they are enjoying themselves at this crib. Dowager Lady Bareblades should see this, old boy."

Dudley laughed, but strolled towards the apartment on the other side of the staircase, and away from the ball-room. It was a refreshment-room of humble pretensions, with low long tables, on which were biscuits and oranges, with a counter at the extremity, where coffee and lemonade were in reserve. There was a lovers' quarrel going on at the table next to Dudley, and Dudley, a student of human nature, sat and observed this, after ordering his sherry and seltzer of



a dilapidated waiter. The lovers were at high words—the course of true love had not run smoothly that particular evening—there had been flirtation at work, and jealousy had been the consequence, and now the weaker vessel was “catching it.”

“I told you yesterday not to dance with him,” muttered the man, angrily.

“What was I to do?”

“Wait for me.”

“I did wait till the last minute—I was not going to lose my dance,” said the girl, sharply: “you should have made haste if you wanted me for your partner.”

“I couldn’t come before the governor let me off,” cried the aggrieved man. “What’s the use of talking such foolery as that?”

“Foolery!” exclaimed the girl.

“Yes—foolery! What else do you call it?” was the blunt rejoinder.

“Very well, Ben. You don’t dance with me any more to-night.”

"Oh! I can find plenty of other girls, if that's your game," he said.

"Find them," cried the girl, "and welcome!"

"Damme—I will too. I won't be served like this. I'll go and dance my hardest," and Ben sprang up like a bomb-shell.

"Go—and joy go with you," said the girl, saucily.

Ben, a beetle-browed, unamiable young man with a pasty complexion, marched away from his lady-love and passed into the ball-room without a backward glance at her whom he had taken to task. Dudley regarded the girl attentively after her lover's departure. Had she gone too far with her humble, but irritable, swain, and was she sorry for it? There was a thoughtful expression on her face for an instant, and then she laughed pleasantly and unaffectedly to herself, as at a jest that pleased her.

"You don't seem very deeply distressed at that young man's desertion of you," re-

marked Dudley, suddenly. The words escaped him before he had time to think—even if he had been disposed to think of the matter at all. There was no impropriety in addressing a young woman at a dancing establishment—there was no harm meant—and he was an inquisitive man, and interested.

The girl turned towards the speaker somewhat surprised at his sudden salutation, but not embarrassed by it. An urgent need for formal introductions at the Grandison on a quadrille night had been never clearly apparent.

“Distressed! Not I indeed,” she said, with a toss of her head.

“He’s very angry,” remarked Dudley, with mock solemnity.

“He’ll cool down quick enough. I’ve known my gentleman before to-night,” she replied, with another toss of her head.

“Used to his little tempers, then?”

“I should think I was!”



"It might be wise to apologise," said Dudley, drily.

"Me apologise—to him! Me!" cried the girl, taking his words in sober earnest, he spoke so seriously and looked so gravely at her. "I'll pay him out for this presently, see if I don't."

"Ah! I'm afraid I shall not be here to see the fun."

"No—really," said the girl, amused that anyone should think of quitting the Grandison before the last galop had been played and the fiddlers had packed up their instruments. She regarded her interrogator more attentively, and noticed that he was better dressed and better gloved, and altogether a different kind of being from the men who came to Frisk Street. She saw, in fact, that this was a swell—that he was in full dress, with a button-hole worth three and sixpence in his light coat—and with things in his shirt-front that shone like gold, and perhaps were made of it, who could

tell? She became suddenly reserved, as if conscious that he had been "chaffing" her, and was probably vexed with herself that, in her excitement and petulance, she had not detected more quickly his badinage. The sudden change of manner was a new surprise to Dudley, and added to his amusement—and then there gradually dawned on his comprehension also the fact that the girl was singularly beautiful. It had not struck him earlier; he had been interested in her manner rather than in herself, but the fact was very patent to him now, that here, under other circumstances, was a face that a painter might love to copy, a poet to rave about, a sculptor to immortalize in marble. He was only five-and-twenty, and could appreciate beautiful faces in women for all the hard dry studies which had kept him stern, and dull, and steady, to that memorable date of his life.

He was interested now, or amused, or something. He did not attempt to define

his feelings, but the sudden reserve exhibited by his companion puzzled him, and even pleased him. In his own circle, and when in high spirits, he had been told by fair women once or twice that he was "an aggravating fellow," "a tease," and he drifted into his teasing mood, as though this little girl was one of his "set" and it was his business to "draw her out," and give life and colour to her.

It was a matter of some difficulty, for his companion answered in monosyllables now, and turned her head from him whilst she spoke. To an inquiry, at last, if she would take any refreshment, she answered "No," with an asperity that silenced him until the dance was over in the ball-room, and the majority of the dancers came talking and laughing into the refreshment department, and the man with whom the girl had had a few words sat down at a table opposite and glowered across at them. He had brought his partner with him into the saloon, prob-

ably to pique the young lady whom he had left there—but the experiment was a failure, and the sight of Dudley by the side of the girl he had reproved was a blow from which he did not quickly recover.

The girl began to talk to Dudley with more animation also, but her companion did not take it as a compliment, seeing the game of life pretty clearly here, and feeling that he came in useful at this juncture, nothing more. Still he rattled away glibly enough, said some smart things at which his companion laughed merrily and musically, and even clapped her hands, and the man over the way looked as if he would be glad to cut his throat.

“Zeph!” he called out at last, peremptorily, “come and sit here.”

“Thank you, Ben,” was the curt reply, “I am quite comfortable where I am.”

“You had better stay there, then,” he grunted forth.

"I mean to, as long as I choose," she answered back, defiantly.

Dudley began to think he was in the way, and hardly doing the correct thing in rousing the ire of the pale-faced man opposite; he would have said "good night" and gone away, had not the jealous man directed public attention to him by some remark which did not reach his ears, but which set half-a-dozen greasy-looking youths into a roar of laughter. After that, Dudley resolved to remain and to make himself at home, and show to all whom it might concern that he was not to be scoffed off the premises.

"Your young man is getting jealous," he said to the girl.

"He's not my young man," was the quick answer.

"Didn't you tell me he was?"

"You know I didn't."

"Well, he's next door to it," said Dudley, he would be if you cared to have him."

“ Ah ! that’s another thing,” said the girl, laughing heartily again as she looked at Dudley, who thought he had never encountered such deep blue eyes, and with so much liquid light in them. Yes, this was a very pretty young woman ; and she was aware of the fact. She was different from any young woman whom he had met before, too ; he wished this straightforward, blunt style of reply was fashionable in his circle, it would save a deal of trouble and misunderstanding, and people would jog along the better for it.

“ What is he ?” he asked.

“ He’s a plumber and gas-fitter,” she replied. “ His father keeps a shop at the corner of Edwin Street, you know.”

“ Ah, yes, a very good shop,” said Dudley, as though he had known the neighbourhood and the business all his life ; “ and Ben helps his father ?”

“ That’s it.”

“ And Ben will presently come into the

business, and marry you, Zeph, and that's the end of the love-story."

"Don't call me Zeph, if you please," said his companion, with a sudden exhibition of dignity that would have discomfited most men.

"Why not?" he replied, innocently—far too innocently for Frisk Street. "That is your name—is it not?"

"You have no right to call me by it, if it is."

"I don't know any other."

"And you won't either."

"Won't I?"

"No—that you won't!"

"We shall see."

There was a pause, and then Dudley said, thoughtfully—

"Zeph is a very odd name."

"I am sorry you don't like it," said Zeph, in the same pert tone—"awfully sorry!"

"But I do like it."

"I daresay you do. Oh! yes."

Zeph laughed merrily again, and looked across at Ben, who ground his teeth together and swore profanely, and wondered what they both were talking about, and cursed them both, especially the man in the dress coat and gloves, and with a finical flower in his button-hole. Curse him? Yes, certainly, with the greatest satisfaction in life.

"What is Zeph short for?" Dudley asked.

"I shan't tell you."

"I wish you would," he urged. "I am really curious; upon my honour."

She seemed to give way, as his tone became more earnest.

"Oh! well, then, Zephyrina, if you must know," she answered. "And now don't bother me any more."

"Am I bothering you?"

"Yes."

"Shall I go away?"

"Yes. You are off to a party, I sup-



pose?" she asked, a little curiously, in her turn.

"I was thinking of going. I am not quite certain I shall."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"Ah! you haven't taken all that trouble to dress for nothing. And that fine flower, too?"

"You may have that."

"May I?" and Zeph's eyes sparkled with pleasure for a moment, and then were suddenly veiled by her long lashes. "Oh, no, thank you," she added the instant afterwards.

"You will not have it?" he inquired.

"No, thank you; I would rather not."

"You don't like flowers?"

"Yes, I do."

"You don't think Ben would like you to accept it?"

"It doesn't matter to me what Ben likes," she replied.

"There! he is off with his young lady again!"

"A pretty young lady she is!—there isn't a scrap of a lady about her. I know her and her great red hands. Just look at them!"

"They *are* a trifle red," observed Dudley.

"Perhaps it's the weather."

"Or the scrubbing-brush. I always thought she was a servant," said Zeph, almost vindictively.

"Yes, you *are* jealous," Dudley remarked.

"Upon my word and honour, I ain't," said Zeph.

"You know you are fond of little Benjamin," said Dudley, in so reproving and quaint a tone that Zeph laughed merrily, and this time unaffectedly.

"I like your style," she said, sarcastically, at last.

"Meaning you dislike my impudence?"

"Perhaps I do. Why don't you go to your party?" cried Zeph. "Your swell

friends will be advertising for you presently."

"I am very comfortable here, thank you."

"You don't look it."

"I am waiting to see you dance," said Dudley.

"Don't know that I shall dance any more," was the answer.

"Why not?"

"Can't say. Perhaps because I can't find any partners while you sit here jawing to me."

This was very frank; amazingly frank, but excessively inelegant. It jarred upon the susceptibilities of Dudley, and he shuddered until he caught sight of her face, fair, fresh, young, and full of the happiness of life's beginning—a face looking innocently out at the world yet, and knowing nothing and guessing but little of the world's temptations. Certainly not eighteen years of age, this bright girl, in whom his interest was not growing less, who puzzled him and

bewildered him by her originality and piquancy.

"How do you know I am not going to ask you to favour me with your hand for this waltz?" asked Dudley, in reply to her.

"Oh! yes; you are sure to dance."

"What is to hinder me?"

"You are much too fine. You wouldn't like to mix with all the people you see here?"

"You are very much mistaken."

"Oh! I know," said Zeph, laughing again.

"We have had one or two of you gents before, but they never dance."

"But I will—if you will accept me for a partner," said Dudley, positively.

Out came her favourite word again in her surprise.

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"But——"

"Will you have me, or not?" he said, impatiently.

"Yes, I don't mind."

"Come along, then."

Dudley had taken off his overcoat, pitched it into a corner, and was now moving down the room with Zeph on his arm. At the door his friend Frank was standing, and he pushed him lightly aside.

"Out of the way, you wall-flower!" he exclaimed.

"By Jove!—what—Dudley!" cried his friend, and, before Frank had recovered from his astonishment, Dudley and Zeph were whirling round the ball-room together at double-quick time. It was a wild waltz while it lasted, but, before they were tired, the music had ceased.

"Bother," said Zeph, "how soon!"

"Never mind—we'll go in for the next, whatever it is," said Dudley, rashly; "is it a bargain?"

"I don't mind," answered Zeph, very graciously.

She was in high spirits now, and secretly

proud of her partner, though he was not vain enough to guess that for himself. They promenaded in the ball-room with the other couples, and Zeph laughed and nodded to her various acquaintances, and exchanged "Good evenings" and "How d'ye do's" with some of the most extraordinary specimens of mankind whom Dudley thought he had ever seen in his life.

"Do you come here very often?" he asked, suddenly and almost sadly.

"Twice a week sometimes, always on a Saturday," replied Zeph; "I can get out best on that day, of course."

"Why, of course?"

"Because business closes earlier, to be sure."

"May I ask what your business is?"

"I am just out of my apprenticeship to the millinery," Zeph answered, frankly.

"Are you very much shocked?"

"Not at all. What would the world be without milliners?"

"Ah! what indeed?"

"Have you a father and mother?"

"Well, you are a cure for questions. I have a father. The mother," she added, becoming suddenly grave, "is dead."

"I am sorry I asked," said Dudley, very earnestly; "you must not mind what I say."

"I don't much. Still mother has not been dead so long, that——" and here she came to a full stop, and dashed something quickly from her eyes.

"This is not a bad-sized room," Dudley hastened to say, after an awkward silence.

"No—and they are taking their places for the next dance."

"What dance is it?"

"The Lancers."

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Dudley.

Still the Lancers it was, and he fought bravely through it, and laughed, and talked, and made himself agreeable to the members of his particular set of eight, and was called "old chap" and "mate" by one or two

friendly souls of his own sex, and clasped vigorously at "corners," by agile young beings of the opposite sex, and enjoyed his dance with Zeph as well as it was possible under the circumstances. He was more interested than ever in this little girl—she seemed above the rest of her class here—too good, and pretty, and pure to run the gauntlet of all these grimy young Hebrews and Christian cads without gloves, these leering, howling, queer-looking beasts who called her Zeph—he heard half a dozen of them address her by her Christian name.

"You let your favourites call you Zeph, I see!"

"Yes—when they know me."

"Perhaps I shall be a favourite some day," he said, lightly.

"I don't think that's very likely," she answered, lightly too.

"Why not?"

"Well, the coolness of you!" she said.



"That's a good one. You won't come here again, I know that."

"There's no telling what may happen," was Dudley's reply. "But I don't think I shall come very often."

"No—I suppose not."

"I wish you kept away."

"Why?" asked the girl, very much surprised now.

"You might do better than come here," said Dudley. "You will pardon me for saying this on so early an acquaintance, but these rooms are hardly a fit place for a young girl."

"It's respectable—you can't say a word against it!" she said, indignantly. "There's gents here as well as you."

"I should be sorry to think ill of the Grandison—but you come alone."

"Very often. I find plenty of friends when I get here."

"And plenty of friends to see you home?" he asked, meaningly.

"Ben puts me in an omnibus generally ; that's all."

"Lucky Ben !"

They went back into the refreshment room, where Zeph condescended, on this occasion, to take a glass of port wine (far ruddier than the cherry that logwood decoc-tion was) at her partner's expense, and to sit at the table again at which he had first made her acquaintance. Here Frank came up, looking almost angry at his friend's neglect of him, and altogether puzzled by his new style of behaviour.

"Is it not time we started?" he asked, querulously.

"I am ready when you are."

"Oh, I have been ready this hour and a half," said Frank, strolling towards the door.

"An hour and a half!" said Dudley, looking at his watch. "So it is! How time flies when a fellow is happy!"

He put on his overcoat again, standing and looking down at the bright face of the girl with whom he had danced.

"Will you have this flower now," he asked, "'in memory of' &c.?"

"Thank you."

He took it from his button-hole and placed it in her hand, and she looked up at him half archly, half thoughtfully.

"Good night, little Zeph," he said.

"Good night, sir."

"When I see you again, I shall ask you to dance with me," he said, lightly.

"Ah! *when* you do," she answered.

"Perhaps you don't want to see me again?"

Strange feeling! but his heart was beating more rapidly than its wont, as if in doubt about her answer.

"Oh, you haven't made yourself particularly disagreeable," she said, with her old sauciness apparent.

"Not like Ben?"

"No, not a bit like Ben," she repeated, laughingly.

"And you will not be very sorry to see me again, then?"

"N—no," with affected hesitation, "not very, I think. But I can exist without you—by an effort."

He laughed himself at her manner; then the impulse came to him to tempt this light little milliner into a promise. She was very pretty; she attracted him, and he was not his old steady, grave self that night.

"I fancy *I* can't exist well without you," he said, in a low tone. "I should like to see you again, just for half an hour's chat, when you come from business one evening. May I?"

She looked up at him with surprise in her eyes, and a flickering colour on her cheeks.

"Will you meet me," he urged, "this day week, at the corner of the street, for half an hour?—only a few minutes, if you like; but please come."

She did not answer at once.

"You are laughing at me," she said, looking down.

"No, I am not."

"Really?"

"Really; I am in earnest. Will you come?"

"Yes, I think I will," she murmured.

"What time?"

"Eight."

"Very well."

"Thank you, Zeph. Good night."

"Good night," she responded; and, long after he had gone away, proud of his small conquest—such as it was—over this vain, pretty, poor little work-girl, Zeph sat there thinking of all that he had said, and all that she had promised in return.

## CHAPTER II.

## A GARDEN-PARTY.

DUDLEY GREY and his friend Frank Amore went away laughing from the Grandison Rooms. They left, as they came, with a jest, and Frank Amore, a good-tempered fellow in his way, forgot speedily how long he had been kept waiting by his friend.

"You have been going it, Dudley," he said; "by Jove, I never saw you enter into the spirit of a thing of this kind before."

"It was the champagne we had at dinner, Frank."

"It was the pretty little woman with the big eyes, you hypocrite," cried Frank.

"Yes, she is pretty," said Dudley. "I was interested in a quarrel between her and her sweetheart, and so drifted into conversation afterwards."

"And to two dances after that. I shall never forget those Lancers," said Frank, with a shout of laughter that awoke the echoes of the street; "and you arm-in-arm with three carpenters, each grinning at his *vis-à-vis* before turning to places. It was a scene out of a play."

"It was droll," remarked Dudley, thoughtfully.

"What would the Bareblades say?" exclaimed Frank. "What would Geraldine think of her cavalier behaving in this extraordinary fashion at an eightpenny hop?"

"She would laugh at all eccentricities."

"Then I may tell her, Dud?"

"Certainly you may."

But Frank Amoore did not mention their adventure when the two young men arrived at the residence of the Dowager Countess

Bareblades, and Dudley seemed quickly to forget it, in the fascination of high-bred women and the excitement of a *soirée dansante*, with more champagne at supper. He forgot his promise to meet this Zeph on the following Tuesday—possibly forgot Zeph altogether. At all events, he did not tell Frank how far his flirtation had extended, and Frisk Street to the younger man lay a long way off next day, and was as remote as the Antipodes by that day week.

And Dudley Grey? Well, when Tuesday came, he remembered his appointment; he thought about it at the club, at his chambers in Clement's Inn, at the hospital where Frank was resident surgeon, and where he called to see Frank that morning, as briefs were scarce with him, but where he never mentioned the name of the girl that was upon his mind, despite the faint efforts that he made to shake her from it. At his club again after dinner he thought even more and this time seriously, of the situation—



shrugging his shoulders at the idea which troubled him.

"I don't mean her any harm, Heaven knows—I wouldn't do her any harm for the world," he said to himself; "*but* I wonder if she'll be there."

After wondering for five more minutes over his coffee, he indulged in another little soliloquy.

"I might do an impressionable girl like Zeph some good by advising her to give up that dancing den. To be sure I might," and, full of this noble resolve, Dudley Grey set forth in search of Zeph the milliner.

He was at the corner of Frisk Street ten minutes before the time appointed; he was always a punctual man, but he never remembered his being so much before time as on this occasion. He must have walked fast, or miscalculated his distance, and those ten minutes in advance of the appointment became terribly wearisome, and exhausted all the distractions of the murky street

wherein he lingered. It was a dreadful street ; when it was striking eight, and there was no sign of the girl whom he had come to meet, he wished fervently he had named another and more respectable thoroughfare. People stared at him too much—the shops were common-place, and the contents of their windows devoid of interest—a woman at the fried fish-establishment opposite came to the door to inspect him thoroughly—the greengrocer's boy winked at him, as though he guessed the reason for his lingering on the kerb-stones—women with baskets of laundry-work ran against him at odd corners—the policeman passed him half-a-dozen times, and took him in from top to toe on each occasion ; he felt hot and uncomfortable, and angry, and out of place. By a quarter past eight he was miserable and abject ; at half-past eight he was anxious ; when it was a quarter to nine he was savage ; as it was striking nine by a church clock in the distance he turned away with

some very bad words on the tip of his tongue, and marched off to his club in an unamiable mood.

He was a fool. He should have known better than to trust to the word of a silly little milliner, and let her have the laugh of him—perhaps tell her friends and acquaintances how she had “sold” the “swell” who came to the Grandison last Tuesday, and tried to trick her into an appointment with him. Yes—that was it—for as he turned out of Frisk Street he ran against the thick-set, pasty-faced individual of the name of Ben, who smiled maliciously, and looked after him until he was out of sight. That was the joke, and he had been the victim of it. So be it. Such is life, when a man goes out of his sphere in search of adventure, or excitement, or to do anybody a good or a bad turn. He had put himself out of his way purely for the girl’s sake—to be a friend and counsellor to her—and this was how he had been rewarded for his pains!

Yes—it was a good joke, but he would keep it to himself. He was glad that he had not said anything of the affair to Frank Amooore. Frank would have seen the joke too clearly, and laughed unpleasantly over it.

For days afterwards, however, the non-fulfilment of Zeph's promise perplexed as well as vexed Dudley. Why did she not come after all? She surely meant to come when he had asked her. Was she afraid of him? Did she see harm in him, or fear harm to herself? Did she think he would not be there, or had she utterly forgotten his existence, or was she going out with pasty face, or was she ill, or had she been unavoidably detained? He was a vain man in his quiet way—not very vain—not even known to be a vain man by his friends; but the idea occurred to him more than once that it was a remarkable thing that Zeph had not kept her word. He was surely an improvement on the Grandison cads; for what she knew, he might have fallen des-

perately in love with her at first sight; he was a gentleman, and she was losing a chance by not coming to meet him.

All these thoughts for two or three days, crossed by the reflection that Zeph was very pretty and naïve and original—"quite a character," and he was fond of studying character—and then she melted away from the foreground of his meditations, and he drifted slowly into his own world where Geraldine was, and where he was considered a very clever fellow, who would make a name for himself one of these fine days.

An advertisement in the newspapers took him back to the old thought. This was in the beginning of June, when he had almost forgotten Zeph and the Grandison Rooms. He read it over attentively, and laughed heartily at a new project which its perusal suggested. Frank Amore entering his chambers at that moment found him on the broad grin.

"What the deuce are you laughing at?" he asked, unceremoniously.

"Do you remember the Grandison, last April, Frank?"

"To be sure."

"Look here, then. Here is the concluding chapter of that little comedy."

Frank took the paper from his friend's hands, and read—

"THE GRANDISON GARDEN-PARTY.—Mr. Smiles begs to inform his friends and patrons that the annual garden-party of the subscribers to the Grandison Rooms, Frisk Street, Soho, is fixed for the 10th inst., at Keston Common, near Bromley. A ball will take place in the Grandison Rooms on the evening of the same day, and form the concluding night of the season. For tickets and full particulars apply to the principal, at the Rooms, from seven till ten P.M."

"What a wind-up to the festivities of Frisk Street, Dudley!" said Frank. "Fancy

meeting all those people in the broad daylight!"

"I could not fancy that at all," replied Dudley.

And yet on the 10th inst., on a bright summer day in June, it occurred to the oddly-constructed mind of Dudley Grey, barrister-at-law, that he would take the train from Ludgate Hill and run down to Bromley for half an hour's fresh air. He was not in love with Zeph; she would have completely died out of his recollection, had it not been for the advertisement concerning the garden-party. He had no thought of reviving the flirtation of a couple of months back, even of speaking to her, unless she recognized him, and put herself out of the way to say a word to him; he was simply curious to learn if that quaint girl were one of the party. Then he was writing a book, too—though that was a secret to the world at present; and surely a medley of humanity, such as a garden-party of

this description, should give him character and incident to study. Dudley had heard from the men who wrote books that they mixed with all kinds of people, on all kinds of occasions, and he must do the same thing, *sans cérémonie*, if he wished to put real life into the pages of his novel. So business as well as curiosity took Dudley Grey to Keston, and if he had another reason, he kept it to himself.

He walked leisurely from Bromley to the Common, hesitating when he had reached that picturesque bit of landscape, and feeling half disposed to walk on swiftly into the heart of green Kent until it was time to make for the nearest railway station and home. Then the sound of voices was borne to him on the summer wind, merry laughter and light music, and, when he was standing on the bridge dividing the two lower lakes of Keston, he could see the garden-party in full force on the higher ground, and be a witness to the enjoyment of the scene, with-



out approaching it too closely. If he had had an idea of intruding upon the company, he abandoned it at once ; he was quite content to lounge away an hour in the distance, listening to the far-off music, and watching what seemed from his solitary standpoint the general happiness of the community. He would have been glad to catch a glimpse of Zeph ; to see how she looked in her holiday dress and in the sunshine that glowed upon the landscape ; but, after all, he was not particularly anxious about it. She was a nice little woman, who would look well in anything, and he only hoped that she had found a better companion for herself than “pasty face” that day. He smoked a cigar, and leaned against the railing of the bridge, and dropped off into a dreamy state, half torpor and half *réverie*, until the rippling laughter of two girls who were running through the bracken on the further bank turned his attention in a new direction. One was tall, and the other

short, and both were young. They were concealing themselves from their lovers, perhaps, or glad to get from the crowd for a while, and they came on swiftly through the ferns and grass, and round the bend of the water's edge towards the barrister.

"Come along, Zeph; here's a little peace and quietness this way," Dudley heard the taller young woman say; "we have had enough of Ben and Charlie for the next half hour."

"I should think we had," answered Zeph; and then the girl with whom he had danced at the Grandison Rooms tripped along like a fairy in white muslin, and, followed by her companion, passed Dudley on the bridge.

Both girls looked at Dudley as they hurried by—it was a habit of the Grandison girls to look about them a little—and the taller girl laughed, not too modestly, perhaps, at the grave, handsome lounge. Zeph glanced at Dudley, and tripped by in utter

ignorance of her old partner, and he let her pass him, and then suddenly and impulsively cried—

“Zeph!”

The girls stopped, and the younger and prettier looked shyly from under the radiance of a hat, all maize and white silk tripping, at the gentleman who had addressed her thus familiarly.

“I have not the honour,” she said, very modestly and quietly; “I—I do not remember you, really!”

“It’s the gentleman’s fun,” said the other, laughing loudly; “he heard me call you Zeph. Didn’t you now?”

“Oh, no!” answered Dudley. “I have met this young lady before, only her memory is at fault a little, and partners are numerous at the Grandison.”

Zeph regarded him more intently, and then clapped her hands softly together, after an old habit of hers, and smiled, half in surprise, and half in recognition of him.

"I know!" she cried—"I know now. It was nearly two months ago—one Tuesday night. You danced a waltz with me."

"And the Lancers afterwards," added Dudley.

"Of course; I remember everything."

"Everything—you are quite sure?" he said, meaningly.

Zeph blushed very much, and looked away from him.

"I have not forgotten," she said; then she faced him again, and added, "do you live about here, in this beautiful part of the world?"

"Oh, no, I am a true Londoner," he answered.

"How strange you should be at Keston to-day!"

"Not at all."

"We have a garden-party here from the Grandison," she said.

"Yes. I should not have come had I

not seen the advertisement in the newspaper," he replied, very coolly.

"But you——"

"Haven't joined the party. Well—no—not at present. It is hardly likely that I shall," he added, "it is getting late, and you will be soon going home."

"Yes, but what did you come all this way for?" asked the curious girl.

Dudley did not answer at once, and he was surprised to find that Zeph's companion answered quickly for him, and very much to the purpose. There was no beating about the bush with Carrie Saunders. She was six-and-twenty, had danced for years at the Grandison, and knew human life tolerably well.

"What's the good of asking that silly question, Zeph?" she cried, half indignantly. "You know all about it as well as he does. You have planned this between you. You can't do me,—I ain't a fool! But you might

have said you were going to meet the gentleman though."

"I had no appointment with the gentleman. Really!"

"Upon my honour she had not," added Dudley, in her defence.

"Ah! tell that to the marines," said the sceptical young woman. "I know! I see it all! Well," with another burst of laughter, "I won't tell Ben a word about it, only don't be long away, Zeph, or there will be the fat in the fire, and no mistake."

And away scuttled Carrie Saunders from them, heeding not Zeph's entreaty for her to remain. Zeph turned quickly to Dudley and said,

"I will bid you good day; I must go after her."

"I will not detain you more than a minute."

"I must go," said Zeph, in evident confusion.

"You are afraid of me then?" he asked.

"Oh, no! It takes a great deal to frighten me," she said, with her old crispness, "but I would rather go, please."

Dudley was annoyed at the girl's anxiety to be quit of him. The vanity that was at the bottom of his heart was piqued considerably, and he said,

"You might spare me a few minutes' sober conversation, young lady, after my coming all this way in search of you."

"In search of me—really? You?" and the blue eyes opened wider and wider in their astonishment, and the fair cheeks took a deeper tinge of crimson into them.

"Yes. I thought I should like to see you again," he confessed.

"But I might not have been here after all. It was a chance. Father did not like my coming."

"He is a wiser father than I thought he was," said Dudley, drily; "but you have a will of your own?"

"Yes, I have."

"And there was an attraction here that you could not withstand."

"Perhaps there was—perhaps there wasn't," said she, saucily.

"Ben the beloved?"

"Ben, indeed!" and the maize and white hat was tossed to and fro with a disparaging movement that would have seriously wounded the feelings of the absent plumber, had he been aware of it.

"Well, have you enjoyed the holiday?" inquired Dudley.

"Very much. I work too hard not to enjoy being out in the country."

"You are going to the ball in the evening?"

"Of course I am."

"You'll kill yourself with pleasure, and there'll be an end of you," Dudley remarked.

"I don't care to live very long," was the strange answer; "I don't want to grow old."



"Why not?"

"Nobody will care for me when I am old."

"Ben will, if you treat Ben well," said Dudley.

Zeph stamped her foot impatiently at this further introduction of Ben's name into the discourse, and almost frowned when Dudley laughed at her vehemence.

"I wish you would not talk of Ben," she cried; "he is nothing to do with you."

"No; Heaven be praised!"

"And I haven't time to stay any longer."

"Thank you for staying at all, Zeph. May I say Zeph?" he asked.

"No, you mayn't. It's like your impudence."

"You are not angry because I came all this way to see you?" he inquired.

"You never did!"

"I did, indeed."

"I ought to be very much flattered," she said, looking down. "What did you want to see me for?"

"Why does a man go out of his way to see a pretty girl, as a rule?" asked Dudley.

"I can't say," she answered, with her blue eyes sparkling, "men are such odd creatures."

"Besides, I wanted to ask you a question."

"You have asked me a dozen already."

"One more will make a baker's dozen, Zeph."

"What is it?"

"Why did you not come to meet me at the corner of Frisk Street, on the Tuesday following the night I saw you at the Grandison?" he inquired.

"Were you there?" she asked, curiously.

"Yes."

"Really, now?"

"Really."

She blushed, looked down, laughed, looked up at him again with a full, steady light in her eyes, and said—

"Why did I not meet you?"

"Yes."

"Because I thought afterwards it was not right."

"You did think of it again?"

"Oh! yes; for days. And then I made up my mind I would not come," she said.

"Good girl—prudent Zeph," replied Dudley. "Keep as wise as that, child, to the end of your days, and you will be safe from all danger."

"You are a nice one to preach!" said Zeph, laughing. "Did you wait long for me?"

"An hour."

"Poor man!" said she, with mock commiseration. "I wish I had said 'No' to you at the Grandison."

"It is of no consequence," replied Dudley.

"But it was a dull, miserable night, wasn't it?"

"It was. But I saw Ben, and he made faces at me."

"He never told me he had seen you," she

said, laughing. "I am sorry you waited for me—but it would not have been right to come."

"All was for the best, I daresay. Why, you did not even know me this afternoon?"

"Not at first. Who would have dreamed of your being in this part of the world?"

"There is no telling where I may turn up," he replied; "I am not accountable for my actions."

"Oh! good gracious,"—with a pretty exhibition of feigned alarm—"let me get away from you at once."

"Perhaps I may look in at the Grandison this evening."

"I wish you——"

Then she stopped, and he said, earnestly,

"Go on."

"No, thank you, I'd rather not."

"You should always finish your sentences," he said, reprovingly.

"Oh! should I?"

"And if you'll only say that you would

not be particularly sorry to see me at the ball—it is more than possible that I shall come creeping in at a late hour to say good night to you.”

“How kind of you!” she cried, ironically, “but I shan’t say anything of the sort.”

“Very well.”

“There’s the rooms,” she said, half pettishly, half flippantly, “and if you want to see me, you know where to find me. And if you don’t—why you can do the other thing.”

“Admirably argued,” he said, coolly, “I will reflect upon the position.”

“Good afternoon, then.”

“Good afternoon.”

He extended his hand, and she placed hers within it, and looked at him shyly again. For an instant the thought crossed him that he would attempt to kiss her, and then something in her look told him it would be a failure, and that he should offend her. It was not likely he should ever see

her again, he thought—here was the end of a funny and singular kind of flirtation—he would not hurt her feelings by any eccentricity of conduct.

“Good-bye,” he said.

“Good-bye, sir,” answered Zeph.

She went away among the bracken towards the revellers, looking back once at him, and waving her hand in return to his salutation, before she disappeared amongst the trees.

“She’s a curious girl,” he soliloquized, “a nice girl certainly, and above her class altogether. Now many a man would hunt that poor girl to death—to a moral death, if possible. What black-hearted devils there are in this world, to be sure! How easy for one of them, if he were good-looking, and clever, and young, to talk this semi-fast little coach out of her honest sphere into wrong before she knew where she was. Poor little Zeph!—good-bye to you. I wonder what Geraldine would think

of Dudley Grey talking to a pretty shop-girl on Keston Common. I wonder what this world of starch and decorum would say about the matter altogether."

## CHAPTER III.

## SMILES'S BENEFIT.

THE ball at the Grandison Rooms was a brilliant success. Mr. Smiles finished his season in a blaze of triumph. There was hardly standing-room amongst the crowd of patrons who flocked in to say good-bye to Smiles till next September. All the ladies and gentlemen who had been to Keston, and all the ladies and gentlemen whose various businesses had not permitted them to go to Keston, were there on that particular evening to do honour to the proprietor, to wish him joy, to congratulate him on pecuniary results, and to stand treat



in "sherry wine," until the world to Smiles, on that festive occasion, was steeped in sherry wine to the topmost brim.

Little Zeph was the belle of the ball—everybody acknowledged that fact without a murmur. She wore a new dress for the occasion, too—not the book-muslin of the afternoon's garden-party, but a smart grey merino, trimmed with scarlet,—and a pair of the best lavender kid gloves, with scarlet satin bows at the wrists. She came early, and danced till late; she was snapped up by eligible partners—there was a corn-chandler and seedsman, who had a shop in the Tottenham Court Road, and was doing well, and had only six grown-up girls to take care of, who was so extraordinarily attentive to Zeph that it was seen very quickly by perceptive contemporaries that "Budds was caught," and it was Zeph's fault if she did not "hook" him before the evening was over. Budds was a friend of Smiles, and a cut above the Grandison folk,

take them in the lump. He had gone to Keston to oblige Smiles, and had come to the ball to oblige Smiles, and drunk a quantity of bad sherry to oblige Smiles, and fallen in love—head over ears—with Zeph Carrington before he knew where he was, or what marvels love and sherry together could effect.

Zeph danced and laughed with the corn-chandler, but kept him at a respectful distance, although Ben—with whom she danced also—took her to task in his usual jealous fashion, and said she was encouraging Old Budds, and that if Old Budds did not behave himself better, he'd be found weltering in his gore before the evening was over. Zeph laughed, and called him "a jealous pate," and "a disagreeable fellow," and flitted from one partner to the other, a being full of light and life whom that long day's holiday had brightened rather than fatigued. If she had been very closely watched, one might have imagined that she

was a trifle too restless and gay, and that, as the hours glided by, she glanced several times during the dances towards the entrance doors, as if half expectant to find a friend there, and half disappointed to miss him in the crowd.

It was twelve o'clock when she caught sight of him, and felt her cheeks burning strangely. He had come then—he had kept his word—he had taken the trouble to find his way to the Grandison especially to see her! She affected not to be aware of his presence during the dance; and only as she passed through the room afterwards, leaning on the arm of her partner—it was Budds again, hot, and short of breath, and reeking—did she look up with as pretty an air of surprise as a West-End belle of half a dozen seasons might have done under similar circumstances.

“Good evening,” said he, very calmly and gravely, as he stopped her and her partner and shook hands with Zeph;

"I hope you have enjoyed your dance?"

"Very much indeed, thank you."

"I am in time for my waltz, I hope—thank you—will you take my arm?" he said, in one breath, and before Zeph could remonstrate, or Budds recover from the confusion into which he had been thrown, Dudley Grey had escorted his fair prize into the refreshment-room, seated her at one of the tables, and was regarding her very thoughtfully.

"What makes you look at me like that?" Zeph asked, half frightened at his long and steady stare at her.

"I am only wondering why you come here and mix with these people."

"They are very nice people," said she, quickly on defence again.

"You are so much too good for the men here, and so different from the women," he said.

"Oh! it's very fine to tell me that nonsense."

"Upon my honour I mean it," he said, earnestly; "I have been thinking seriously about it."

"How good of you!"

"And when you think seriously too, if you ever are troubled by a serious thought, Zeph," he added, "I hope you will arrive at the same conclusion."

"I don't come here to think," said Zeph, "but to dance and enjoy myself; I have enough time for troublesome thoughts over my work and in my dull home."

"Is your home dull?"

"Yes, very."

"I am sorry for that. I am—— Who the devil's this?" he muttered.

He had known who it was before the impious exclamation escaped him. He had recognized Ben before that sulky young man had recognized him, and dropped his lower jaw on his chest in his astonishment at seeing him.

"Zeph," Ben said, huskily, "it's our

dance ; I could not make out where you had got to."

"Don't dance," whispered Dudley, "I want to speak to you before I go."

Zeph hesitated, coloured, looked at the table, and then at Ben.

"I am very tired, Ben," she said ; "you must let me off this dance, please."

"That ain't fair, that ain't."

"You heard the lady tell you she was tired," said Dudley, in a haughty tone, and Ben stared at the speaker, and then looked away from him to Zeph.

"She needn't come if she don't like," he growled forth.

"Then I don't like," said Zeph, positively.

"All right ; that's English," was Ben's reply, as he walked away with his hands in his pockets, and his head thrown very much back.

"I am afraid we were rather hard on Ben," said Dudley, with mock gravity.

"He never will take 'No' for an answer."

"You are very kind to give up a dance with him to oblige me," Dudley added.

"You need not flatter yourself I did that," said Zeph, standing her ground at every point still; "I don't like dancing with Ben."

"You will tell me next you don't like Ben himself."

"I can't bear him—sometimes."

"Ah! sometimes; but then the other times?"

"He's nothing to me at any time," said Zeph, pettishly. "What do you keep talking about Ben for? What—what do you want to say to me before you go?"

Dudley was silent at this appeal. He hardly knew what he wanted to say, or knowing it, he hardly dared to say it. On the misty borderland separating good intentions from selfishness, irresolution, and this new wild fancy beating at his heart, he hesitated strangely.

"You are making game of me!" cried Zeph, indignantly.

"Upon my honour I am not," he replied. "Why should I come here to 'make game' of you?"

"I don't know," she answered; "I can't understand you."

"It is easily seen why I come to this place."

"No, it is not. Why?"

She met his gaze steadily for a while, but her blue eyes drooped at last.

"You ask me that question?" he said.

"Yes."

"To see you."

"It's all very fine to tell me that," replied Zeph, laughing very loudly; "I wonder how many girls you have said that to in the last five years?"

"Not to one."

"Oh, you story-teller!" cried Zeph.

"For what reason do you think I am in this den?" he exclaimed.



"It's not a den," said Zeph, "and I don't believe you come to see me, because——"

"Well, because?"

"I shan't tell you!" cried Zeph, colouring again. "I have altered my mind."

"Did I not tell you this afternoon that you had a very bad habit of cutting your sentences in half?" said Dudley. "Now please finish this one, for I am very curious. Why did I not come here to see you?"

"Well, then——"

"Go on," he said, as she paused again.


"You would have come a little earlier if you wanted to talk to me," she condescended to explain.

"I have been very busy this evening—I could not get away," he said, and Zeph shook her head incredulously at his reply.

He could not tell her that he had made up his mind not to see her again; that he had scoffed at his own fancy, his own wild wish to meet her—his own bad taste almost, until Frank Amoore had looked him up at

his chambers, and barred the way, as it were, to the Grandison, and then he had fretted and fumed until his friend had gone and left him free to act. This was the result of his freedom : a mad plunge after a pretty face, an insane desire for half an hour's flirtation with a milliner ; the forging of one more link in a chain, the heaviness of which he never dreamed of then.

Heaven alone knew what there was in this half-taught, half-fearless girl to lure his sober self to a tenth-rate dancing-room ; but he felt there was a spell upon him, and that it was beyond his power to account for it. He was ashamed of being there, he was amazed at the company by which he was surrounded. He was a man who had mixed much in society, and had met hundreds of pretty and clever women with whom he might have flirted, had he cared to do so, and to whom he had been pleasant and courteous only, and yet this girl was a fascination despite himself and her-



self. Ay, there was the rub; Zeph Car-  
rington did not encourage him. The  
flaunty, fast style of the ordinary shop-girl  
was not there, only a curious, independent  
frankness that puzzled him, that defied him,  
that looked down upon him and his efforts  
to impress her, that seemed to say, "My  
world is as good as your world, and you  
don't frighten me with the grandeur of the  
sphere from which you have descended."  
She piqued him by her independence, but  
she drew him on almost unwillingly towards  
her.

It was one o'clock, and the band was  
playing its last galop.

"Shall we wind up the evening with a  
dance?" he said, suddenly.

"Just to show that you are not above  
present company," replied Zeph, archly, as  
she rose.

"Just to render this night memorable to  
me," he said, in a tone that startled her, as  
she took his arm and walked to the ball-

room, at the door of which she stopped.

"Oh, my !" she exclaimed, "I am afraid I promised Mr. Budds."

"Never mind that fellow. You will dance with him all the rest of the year, perhaps," he said; and then they were whirling round the room in a galop, and Mr. Budds, after watching them for a while with his thumb-nail between his teeth, dashed at the brown sherry again, and overdid it with four more glasses, and rendered life a blank till the boy took the shutters of the shop down next day, and found him on the parlour rug, with his widowed head against the fender.

Long before that time Zeph Carrington and Dudley Grey were standing in the street together, and the revellers were streaming from the entrance and going their various ways. Zeph was cloaked and hooded, and Dudley hoped that she would not catch cold.

"Not I," she said. "Good night."

"I am going your way," he said.

"No, thank you."

"Part of your way is my way," he said.

"I would prefer it was not," was her reply.

"Are you going home alone?" he inquired.

"I have not far to go," she replied. "I am used to being alone. You must not come with me, please," she added, very firmly now.

"Ben is going your way, perhaps," Dudley said, severely. "You would not say 'No' to Ben."

"Ben knows father, who is sitting up for me. Ben is a friend of mine."

"And I am not."

"Why, of course not!"

"But I may be presently?"

"Not very likely."

"You will not give me a chance," he urged; "you keep me at arm's length, and—and I long to see you again!"

"Oh! don't say that," she cried.

"Will you meet me this time—cannot I see you to-morrow?"

"No."

"Next Saturday, now that this — place is to be shut, thank God?"

Zeph laughed merrily, but did not reply.

"You are frightened of me; you can't trust me," he said, reproachfully.

"I'm not easily frightened; and," she added, "I can trust you, I think."

"Well, promise to meet me here next Saturday—for half an hour only, if you like."

"Oh! it isn't right."

"Where is the harm? I wouldn't harm you for the world," he said.

"No, I don't think you would—even if you could," Zeph added, confidently.

"Then you'll meet me?"

"Very well, then. Yes."

"And you will not break your word this time?"

"No."

"Thank you; it is a compact. Good night."

He left her, and strode towards his chambers, rejoicing for awhile. As he neared home his heart sank a little, and he thought over again that he was acting like a fool and a villain. No, not a villain. God forbid that! but undoubtedly very like a fool.

## CHAPTER IV.

## LOVE IN A FOREST.

**Z**EPH CARRINGTON kept her word on this occasion, and met Dudley Grey. It was the beginning of a new life to both of them, and yet of an old story which happens every day. Flirtations of this character spring up with each turn of the hand upon the dial, and comedy, farce, burlesque, and tragedy result therefrom—the tragedy most often, judging by the painted horrors of our streets. This was the beginning of a tragedy too, after its kind, though neither guessed at the shadows in advance, and there was not a thought of



evil at the heart of man or woman. Each went forward alike blindly, a little recklessly, thinking not of the morrow or of the consequences of this ill-assorted acquaintanceship. The woman was young, and vain, and trusting, and the man was full of adventure and without guile. Neither had known what temptation was, or what love was in real earnest, and both came to be friends, and to keep their strange friendship a secret from a world which would not have believed in them.

Their first meeting was a stroll in the Mall till dusk, and an early parting; their second was at the theatre, where the proud Dudley Grey sat quietly by the side of little Zeph at the back of the pit, where never a friend of his was likely to discover him. Zeph would only go to the pit with him, where she had been with her father and with Ben too, and which was quite good enough for her, she said; and he admired her frankness and smiled at her intense en-

joyment of the play and players. The girl's pleasure in everything that appertained to the amusements of life was a marvel to one on whom public amusements had palled somewhat. She was a child in her love for the stage ; for a while she would forget her new friend in the mimic world before her, turning only to him at the end of an act with " Isn't it beautiful ? " and wondering sometimes at his gloomy, absent looks.

By degrees she came to think of him as a friend—as a fine friend who took her out a great deal, and spent a great deal of money upon her in her estimation ; presently as a superior being, very good but very mysterious, in whom every confidence might be placed, who was a different man from anyone whom she had ever met, who was surely in love with her, and would tell her so on some happy " outing " together, and end the story by asking her to be his wife. He was above her sphere, she knew, but girls married out of their sphere in books and

plays from which real life was sketched, and she was pretty and he was fond of her. She was a lucky girl, she thought. He did not ask any questions concerning her father, a stolid, indifferent man, with a supreme faith in Zeph's being able to take care of herself. Zeph earned her own living and paid her share of the rent, and Mr. Carrington was not at home too much to notice what time his daughter spent away from it; if he had, he would not have been curious—it was not his way. She was a shrewd, careful little woman, was his Zeph, God bless her! Ben Travers came and worried him about his daughter—wanted to discover where she went twice or thrice a week, and with whom, and he told him to ask Zeph if he wished to know, which he did, and was told, somewhat pertly, to mind his own business, which he did too, as well as a man was able who had set his heart on having Zeph for a wife.

And Dudley Grey! what were the feelings

of this eccentric individual, when Zeph Carington had become his companion and friend, and there was a terrible pleasure in her society, a novelty that time did not stale, an attraction that a close intimacy did not tend to diminish? He was ashamed of his own weakness, but not of Zeph. Zeph was always well-dressed, and looked a quiet little lady; she was brisk and full of vivacity —by degrees, as she became his friend, her faculties of observation set much of her grammar right, restored all her h's to their rightful places, did away with all the odd words and slangy phrases common to shop life, shop companions, and the back streets wherein her life had been cast. He would not have owned it to himself at that time, he would still have considered it a silly flirtation, but at the end of three months there was a powerful and indomitable feeling in his heart towards the girl he had picked up in a dancing-room. He would not have called it love, but it was. He would never

let the world have the laugh at him, by saying that a milliner had upset all the sober calculations of his life, but she had. He could not tell a single friend how she stood between him and his studies, the bar he had been called to, the book he was writing, the friends at his club, and, above all, the woman to whom he was engaged to be married. Yes, that was the trial of this weakling who meant no harm, but who could not see his way clearly to any good now. If it had not been for Geraldine de Courcy (niece, and possibly heiress, to the Countess of Bareblades), a woman whom he thought he had loved once, being only two years older than himself, good-looking, and with expectations. Ah! if it had not been for Geraldine, of whose existence poor Zeph was unaware. He felt that he dared not tell the work-girl of the heiress—Zeph would ask too many questions, and sift out too quickly the truth,—for ever away from Zeph must be the story of that engagement, even the

knowledge of his own position in the world. He was playing an unworthy part, and not always with success. He liked Zeph to think him a poor and struggling barrister, rather than a man with some property of his own ;—all his great, grand friends were kept in the background, away from any conversation on which they might intrude, and it was only now and then that a chance word betrayed him, and rent the veil between Zeph Carrington and the world of which she knew so little, but guessed more than he gave her credit for.

When it came upon him, late in the autumn, that he was really in love with this girl, when her work-life had become a torture to him, and he writhed at her anecdotes of business, and of the coarseness and tyranny of her employers, when everything she said had power to move him, when the fact of her meeting Ben in the streets, or at her home, irritated and maddened him, when he became jealous of workmen and

corn-chandlers, and could think of nothing but this girl, when he became aware that there was love for him in her heart too, and that she seemed only happy in his company, the truth dismayed him, though he tried hard to confront it with philosophy.

It was in Epping Forest when that truth came closer to the foreground, in the dry autumn weather before the rain and cold had set in. They had gone away together—it was Zeph's last holiday, the fourteenth day of the fortnight that Messrs. Dangler, Dapper, and Smart had accorded to her. It had been arranged that they should spend the holiday in the country; Zeph had perfect faith in her companion now, and would have gone to the end of the world with him—and the woodland at Snaresbrook and Fair-Mead had been her idea of England's scenery, when her mother was alive, and took her to the forest in a spring van along with father, and a gallon stone jug, and a noisy gang, who sang all the way

there, and quarrelled all the way home. Our young couple had talked of a picnic together for weeks, but Dudley had only mustered up courage for the adventure at last. Zeph had not seen any reason for consideration or hesitation—faith having been once established between them, the “proprieties,” the usages of polite or impolite society, had never troubled her again. Dudley was her “young man,” who took her out, and respected her when she was out, and, having placed confidence in him, it was illimitable. She did not know any rule that should stop her going anywhere with Dudley Grey, and she went to Epping Forest as she would have gone to a play or concert, without a thought of the etiquette that should govern the proceeding. That Epping excursion was a day of wonderful happiness to them both. To begin with, the joy and excitement of Zeph raised the spirits of Dudley Grey—who had become over-thoughtful of late days—and the world



was very bright on that especial occasion. They were boy and girl rather than man and woman; the old forest echoed with their laughter, and with the music of Zeph's voice. Dudley forgot Zeph was a milliner, with a father who lived down a back street and went to a foundry every day—he forgot Geraldine de Courcy—he forgot he was engaged to be married—forgot everything but his supreme satisfaction in Zeph's society, and that respect for Zeph which he had ever scrupulously shown her.

It was a bright, warm autumn day, with a remembrance of summer in it, and they had the great green forest to themselves after they had wandered out of the beaten track into the by-paths and underwood. It was Arcadia with the troubles and responsibilities of life set back in that outer world to which this odd pair no longer belonged. It was a world set apart from "bonnet-building" and "cap-trimming" to the one, from the dry study of law-books to the

other. It was a holiday, each thought, to be marked by a white stone.

And then the picnic for two, provided by Dudley, and brought to Epping in a bass basket. The cold fowl, the slices of ham, the French rolls, the salad, the champagne, and the fun over the difficulties of disposing of all these, the jests and laughter and bewildering joy in each other's society, constituted a happiness such as they never had again in all their thoughtless lives.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when they talked of making their way to the railway-station, when Zeph looked up at the sky with surprise.

"It will soon be dark, Dudley; let us get towards home."

"Let me finish my cigar, Zeph, and sing to me again before we go," he said.

She looked attentively at him.

"Why, how sad you are, all of a sudden!"

"I am feeling sad," he confessed, mournfully.

"Have I said anything to offend you? I—I know I am sharp at times, and rude, and saucy, but you ought to understand me now. What is it?"

"Nothing, Zeph," he answered, "only a fit of the blues from which I suffer occasionally. Will you forgive me?"

"What have I to forgive?"

"I don't think it was quite fair of me to bring you here," he confessed.

"Why not?"

"You are younger than I. People would say I was a scamp and a villain—and that you were very foolish."

"I don't care what people say," replied Zeph, with the old toss of her pretty head, "if it isn't the truth."

"But these good folk can make what is false look so like the truth that the world judges infernally harsh of the situation."

"I—I don't quite understand," she said, timidly, "you are so strange to-day."

"This is a day for me to remember for

all time. Has it been a happy day for you, Zeph?"

"Yes," she confessed, frankly, "one of the happiest of my life."

"It has been one of the happiest of mine, and yet I wish it had never been!"

Zeph looked hard at him again. His mournful manner was new to her—there was regret, even misery, in his face.

"Tell me what you are thinking about. All this is a novelty to me, Dudley."

"Supposing this was the last day you and I were ever to meet, would you be sorry?" he asked, suddenly.

"The last day—we were ever to meet!" she echoed, and all the colour died out from her face, and left her white and cold and hard.

"Yes—would you be sorry?"

She did not answer for an instant, then she said, very proudly and quietly,

"Not if you wished it."

"You could say 'Good-bye' willingly?"

"More than willingly—if you could," she answered, in the same sharp tone.

"I never implied I could say this willingly," he remarked, "but it might be better for us both, before——"

He did not finish the sentence, and she did not ask him to do so. For a few more minutes they sat together in silence, then he got up and offered his hand to raise her. She did not take his hand, but sprang to her feet without his assistance, and they went on slowly together towards the high road.

"You are quick to take offence, Zeph," he said at last.

"I am not offended," she replied.

"I think you are."

"What have I to be offended about?" she inquired.

"Nothing," he said, "and I did not mean to give offence. I was thinking of you—and only of you—not of myself, God knows."


"I have given up trying to comprehend you to-day," said Zeph, "please do not worry me by riddles."

"I am not fond of riddles, Zeph; but life has become an enigma to me."

"Do you want me to understand that you are tired of my company?" she asked, very resentfully still, "is that what you are driving at?" she added, with her old phraseology coming to the front, as she seemed to step suddenly towards her old life.

"You are dearer to me to-day than you have ever been," he burst forth with vehemence, and then he was silent for her sake and his own. Zeph anticipated that he would talk of love after this, avow his attachment, and draw from her a confession of the deep strong love she had for him, but he preferred to walk on moodily to being frank, and true, and honest, as he should be. If he really cared for her, he would surely speak now—if he were not too grand

and "stuck up" after all—if he loved her as much as he had induced her to believe from the attention which he had paid her. He had led her by degrees to forget her own sphere, and to neglect her friends; he had given her a new existence and bright hopes—he had sought her out and taken her away from her "set"—he had taught her almost by his manner to look down upon all the past amusements of her life. He had rendered her a prouder woman, she had thought even a happier, until this sudden turn had come, and she had discovered there were clouds and doubts about her where she had looked for that eternal sunshine which belongs never to this earth. And yet those last words had brought the smiles back to her lips and gladness to her heart—he could not have been paving the way for a separation or have grown tired of her, to have said all that so passionately and truthfully. He would speak presently, perhaps—meanwhile she was too proud a



girl to betray any of that anxiety which in her heart she naturally felt. For it had come to pass, that, in the heart of hearts of poor Zeph Carrington, Dudley Grey had become her idol—such an idol as a weak fond woman worships with all her soul, and is crushed to the earth when it falls.

She was clever at disguise, however. No man was likely to guess the depth of her feelings without betraying his own clearly to her. She was not going to state that she was in love with Dudley Grey, if Dudley Grey had only thought of her as a passing acquaintance and a pleasant companion for the nonce—not she, indeed !

“ We must not have our holiday end in doubt and discord, Zeph,” he said, “ this should be a fair one to the end.”

“ It is your fault if it is anything else.”

“ Then it shall be my fault no longer.”

He put his arm round her and kissed her lightly on the cheek, and Zeph did not



shrink away from his caress. When a young man takes a girl out for the day he is privileged to kiss her once or twice: that is the rule of the society of which Zeph was a distinguished ornament; and if Ben had kissed her in the days gone by, why not the man who had superseded Ben, and rendered him by comparison almost a monster in her eyes?

Dudley essayed his light vein again, and Zeph seconded his efforts by laughing at his jests. They were seemingly a light-hearted couple as they walked along the high-road in the twilight towards the railway-station. Suddenly the spirit of mischief, or that teasing spirit which is allied to it, and is natural in a woman anxious to test her power over the object of her affections, led Zeph to say,

"I have had a letter to-day, Dudley—from a gentleman."

"Oh, indeed!" and Dudley, too far gone in love to appreciate a joke, became very

glum on the instant; "and what does the *gentleman* say?"

"Ah! that's the secret."

"I did not think you had a secret from me," he said, reproachfully; "but, if you don't care to tell me, I will not force your confidence."

"Cannot you guess who would write a letter to me?"

"Ben?"

"No."

"That ass of a corn-chandler in the Tottenham Court Road?"

"Oh, no!" said Zeph, laughing, at the severity of his criticism on the widower.

"I don't know any more of your *friends*," he said, severely.

"Mr. Smiles, then."

"Who the devil is Smiles?" he asked, almost ferociously.

"Why, the principal of the Grandison Rooms, to be sure."

"What does he want?"

"I'll show you the letter if you wish," said Zeph, submissively, for Dudley Grey's amiability had all vanished.

"If it is not private and confidential," he replied, sarcastically.

Zeph took a letter from her pocket and gave it him, and he read it in the dim light of the dying day as he walked on by her side. It was a printed circular announcing Mr. Smiles's intention of opening the Grandison Rooms the first week in October, and of his renewed endeavours to promote the comfort and pleasure of his patrons, and to render his rooms a pattern of that respectability and decorum for which they had been distinguished whilst under his management. At the bottom of the circular—and here was the sin and grievous offence which, in the eyes of Dudley Grey, Mr. Smiles had committed—was written in lead pencil,

"I reckon upon you for the opening

night. I can promise you heaps of nice young men for partners. Don't fail to come next Saturday.

“E. S.”

“I did not know the cad favoured you with these familiar postscripts,” Dudley said, coldly, as he returned the letter to her.

Zeph's lip quivered, and her eyes brimmed with tears; but she answered, with the old quickness,

“Yes, the cad does sometimes.”

“Then—it's like his infernal impudence.”

“He is an older friend than you are,” she retorted.

“What a friend to be proud of!—a little, red-nosed, gin-drinking sparrow,” cried Dudley, savagely; “a starveling who can scarcely keep soul and body together by the profits of his semi-moral establishment.”

“You have no right to run the place down,” cried Zeph, indignantly; “where

you have been yourself—where you met me first—where you know I go.”

“Where I hope you will never go again, Zeph.”

“I don’t see why I should not,” she answered.

“It is not fit for you.”

“There is no harm in it.”

“It is a disreputable den,” cried Dudley.

“I have spent many a happy evening in it.”

“At the expense of the good opinion of your neighbours, and at the risk of your character,” said Dudley.

“What !” cried Zeph, looking indignantly at him, turning quickly away again and covering her face with her hands. A moment’s silence—a few more steps along the high-road, and then there followed a passionate outburst of weeping, which bore away every atom of forced composure on her side, and of self-restraint on his. All his ill-feeling

and uncharitableness vanished, and a deep concern for her and her grief took possession of him. He had never seen her give way before—he had thought her hard to impress, a charming girl, but defiant and cool and clever.

“Zeph—my dear Zeph—don’t cry!”

But Zeph, once subdued, could not restrain her tears very easily. Her pride had been mortified, his hard words had cut into her heart, and showed how he despised her and her ways, and was prepared to sneer at and heap contumely upon everyone and everything with which her past life had been associated. She had almost thought herself of late days above the glories of the Grandison Rooms, and the triumphs of the Grandison season, for the men were not like Dudley, and talked differently, and seemed of another and a lower world altogether. But it was cruel of him to attack her thus mercilessly—to wound her and her pride—

to think her life immeasurably beneath his own, and tell her so, as a wind up to the bliss of their holiday.

"I might have expected this," she sobbed, "I have been waiting for you to insult me in this way—I have been a fool altogether."

"My dear Zeph, I did not mean to insult you," he cried. "I—I could not endure the thought of your going to those rooms again, and mixing with the people there; you are too good for them—don't cry—I was jealous—I love you, and can't bear this any longer."

He put his arms round her, and kissed her tears away, and Zeph suffered herself to be caressed and consoled. The truth had escaped in a wild moment of excitement, and he had told her that he loved her! He did not say anything more; he did not grow eloquent concerning his love, as the heroes always did in the penny numbers she read, but the confession had escaped him, and a feeling of immeasurable content was at the

bottom of her full young heart. The man loved her, and though she cried still, and he still essayed to soothe her, they were tears of happiness now, born of his avowal.

They walked quietly to the station, even gravely, as if they had entered on a new phase of existence in which they understood each other more completely, and regarded the future—their future—with reverence and awe. They were lovers from that hour, Zeph considered, and there were no more secrets and half confidences to follow that day. In the lottery of woman's life, which has its aim and end in happy marriage, Zeph had drawn a prize, and she was proud of it. Why should she disguise her feelings now that he had told her that he loved her? There was not much lightness or brightness over the rest of the journey home; Dudley was very thoughtful, and Zeph was content to sit quietly at his side, with her hand clasped in his. There was very little conversation exchanged between



them—but Zeph was happy in her silence, and glad to think for herself.

When they were nearing Fenchurch Street, she said, in a low voice,

“ May I tell all to father, Dudley ? ”

Dudley came back from dream-world, and said, quickly, “ No, no—don’t tell your father anything yet.”

“ He knows I have come to Epping with a friend.”

“ A male friend ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ What did he say ? ”

“ Oh ! very little. ‘ You can take care of yourself, I know, Zeph,’ he said, ‘ but I should like to hear a little more of this new friend of yours, for all that.’ Now if I could tell him to-night, and make him almost as happy as myself ? ”

“ Tell him what ? ”

“ Oh ! you know,” said Zeph, blushing, “ for you have not been making fun of me, surely ! ”

"No, Zeph!" he answered, "there is no fun in all this. We have passed out of the region of flirtation into grave facts and earnest truths. But I must think it carefully over—I have a great deal on my mind, girl."

"Will you have any secrets from me?" she asked.

"Not any—presently."

"Will you tell me next time we meet?"

"Yes; next time."

"Oh! Dudley, I am dreadfully happy now," she whispered. "I have been anxious and miserable at times, and you have been often—oh! so strange. It has been so very, very hard trying to understand you."

"How was that?"

"You have been dull and thoughtful, and then so full of fun and—and affection—like a man who did not know whether he cared for me or not," she explained.

"Ah! I knew too well how much I cared, Zeph," he replied.

From Fenchurch Street to the back streets of Soho in a Hansom cab ; and then the parting at the corner of the street where Zeph's father lived.

“ Good night, dear.”

“ Good night, Dudley,” she answered ; “ I will not go to the Grandison any more. Never any more !”

“ That's right—thank you ; there's a good Zeph,” he cried.

“ And I never meant to go, really,” she added, “ because you have always looked so cross when I have spoken of the Rooms. You will forgive my worrying you about them to-day, Dudley, won't you ?”

“ God bless you, child—yes.”

He stooped and kissed her, as he might have kissed a little child even ; and then he bade her “ Good night ” again, and hurried away. With every step from her his heart grew heavier with self-reproach and self-abasement, and the darkness on his path became denser and more heavy. To the

end of all this—so lightly and carelessly begun, as it had been—the barrister did not see his way.

## CHAPTER V.

## IRRESOLUTION.

HAD Dudley Grey, barrister-at-law, been like unto most men, this story need not have been written, or its sequel might easily have been guessed. There is nothing new in a chance acquaintance, a man wandering out of his sphere to make love, and a poor girl flattered into indiscretion, perhaps into destruction. These are the passing events of a great city, the eternal shadows of the streets after the gas is lighted and the work of the day is over.

We have attempted an analysis of the feelings of Dudley Grey and Zeph Carrington.

ton, because both man and woman were ordinary mortals "with a difference." If they met and made love as thousands had done before them, without any heed to the codes of society, they were not able to regard it as a jest, or to part as easily as they had met, with no one the worse for the acquaintanceship. Dudley Grey, with whom we have particularly to do in this chapter, was tortured or blessed with a conscience. He was a man who knew he was on the wrong road, and who made one or two faint efforts to retrace his steps, and was unhappy altogether in his secret courtship. Many men whom he knew would have treated this matter lightly and laughingly, as a mere jest at which they would have expected a girl like Zeph to laugh also. They would not have believed in Zeph any more than they would have expected her—if she had not been quite a fool—to believe in them ; and they would have turned away from her at a moment's notice, or without a

moment's notice, and hardly given her another thought to their lives' end. Fresh faces, new flirtations, and the world only a merry-go-round, with no time to think of the aching hearts and bitter disappointments of a few in the great crowd.

Dudley Grey was new to the business. He had been a studious youth ; he had been always proud and reserved ; he had become engaged early in life to a lady whom he knew he respected, and whom he fancied that he loved, until this wild, strange passion had mastered him and shown him what love was. He knew now that his parents and friends had prompted him to this engagement, had told him what a good thing it was to secure the affections of Geraldine De Courcy, a stately, high-born being who would bring him fifteen hundred a year as a start off, and whose expectations were wonderful. He was a lucky dog to hit the fancy of Miss De Courcy, everybody said, and as she was a beautiful woman, and only

two years his senior, he had never repined at his fate, or seen anything to pine at until his philosophy was upset by a shop-girl!

What was to be done now it was difficult to say. He had gone of his own free will into temptation; he had meant no evil; he had been attracted by the face and manner of a woman to whom he thought it would be easy to say good-bye when he pleased; and the woman had turned to him with her whole heart, and believed in him with a force and passion which had changed the tenor of his life.

What *was* to be done? He thought deeply of the position in his chamber night after night, day after day, with his work at a standstill, and his brain oppressed by the truth. There were two good women on his mind, and he must break the heart of one of them—whose should it be? He was pledged to the lady, his interests, his future position in the world, his honour, were at stake here, but he did not love Geraldine



de Courcy any longer. In her presence he felt that he was a hypocrite, weighed down by a lie as big as a mill-stone. And yet he would fling to the winds all his chances if he married Zeph Carrington; his friends would laugh at him, everybody would laugh at him—one or two, like Frank Amoire, would pity him for being such a fool. And Zeph would not make him a good wife possibly,—and Zeph's relations and friends! Great Heaven, to be dragged down to companionship with them, and to have for a father-in-law a man who was earning thirty-five shillings a week at a foundry. To be poor all his life for the sake of a delusion of this kind—a delusion which would fade and leave him the victim of a *mésalliance*—no, it must not be!

He was fond of Zeph, he knew, but he did not know how terribly fond of this quaint little girl he had become until he had made up his mind to part with her, to wean himself by degrees from the spell of her

companionship. He was wrenching himself away from his better self in the effort, now that the girl looked up to him as to a demigod, and valued him at a higher rate than he deserved. This task of dropping off by degrees—so easy an operation to men of the world, worldly, to men of the town, townish—was a giant's task to Dudley Grey, and beyond his moral strength. He awoke slowly to the consciousness of his own weakness; the tears in Zeph's eyes, the tremor in her voice, at a chance word or a something that suggested a suspicion of a slight, the exuberance of spirits when he was his old self and looked as if he loved her, all told upon him and kept him irresolute. He could not make her unhappy whilst she trusted in him—he dared not tell her yet that he was undeserving of her trust. Wait awhile he must!


Since the expedition to Epping Forest she had altered very strangely too; there was hardly an atom's worth of resemblance to

the bright, pert little woman whom he had "chaffed" at the Grandison Rooms. She was a flirt then, vain of admiration, eager for excitement after work hours, seeing no pleasure in home, but finding her amusements out of it—a "fly-away" girl whom chance might save or bring to ruin, according to the good or evil genius who first influenced her life. Now she was a thoughtful, earnest being, proud of her conquest, and very full of love for it, thinking of nothing else in life save the man who had made up his mind to get away from her, and young and innocent enough to believe in him implicitly. She was so terribly happy in this half engagement that he became afraid of her, and with every meeting it was a greater difficulty to close his heart against her. If he had not been idiot enough to fall in love, he thought, it would have been an easy task to frame a plan of eternal separation, but she had become bound up with his life, with his heart-strings,

and the ordeal was almost beyond his strength. Yet he must leave it to time—he could do nothing hastily and cruelly, he reasoned, meaning, perhaps, that he could not part with little Zeph yet awhile!

To a girl more suspicious or less trustful than Zeph Carrington the actions of her lover might have suggested many grave doubts. They met always in secret. He shunned her home and her father; it was understood, she thought, that for a while, and for “family reasons,” nobody should know what intimate friends they had become; all the truth was to follow presently, and when Dudley gave the signal to let in the sunshine upon the misty border-land wherein she stood with him. He did not talk of the future in this way; on the contrary, he carefully avoided any allusion to it now, but Zeph read it for herself, and thought she saw the end very clearly. She was afraid of his family and his friends; she knew they would look down upon her

always, and think the worst of her that they could, and there was romance in all this secrecy and mystery, and she, poor child, was very young. This man was her first love, and he had come from a world of which she knew nothing! She would keep the secret for his sake; he surely knew what was best, and she was certain that he was very fond of her. If he had been "shamming," she would have known it in an instant, as a woman generally knows the true from the false in matters of this kind, and the very strength of his love for her added to the force of the delusion which deceived her. His fits of sadness were even in his favour, for in her presence there came stern feelings of remorse, which only her smiles could chase away. If he were dull, he had been worried by his family, she thought; somebody had been trying to persuade him to an expedition which would separate them for a time; somebody had seen them together,



perhaps, and had been too curious with his questions.

Some one did come face to face with them at last. They were strolling home together from the theatre, where he took her very often, for his own distraction's sake now, more than for her amusement, when they came face to face with Frank Amoore. The young man looked from Dudley to Zeph, raised his hat, glanced keenly at Zeph again, and passed on.

"Who is that?" she asked. •

"A friend of mine."

"I have seen him somewhere," said Zeph; "why, he came to the Grandison with you the first night we met!"

"Yes, that's right, Zeph. What a memory you have!"

Frank Amoore proved that he had a good memory also—one of those memories which are extremely objectionable to other folk at times. Dudley found him at the gate

of Clement's Inn later on in the night.

"Frank," he exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you," was the grave answer.

"Is anything the matter?"

"I have been to the Bareblades."

"Geraldine is not ill?"

"No. But she expected you this evening. You promised to be there."

"I only half promised."

"Is it too late to have a talk with an old friend in his room to-night?" asked Frank, seriously.

"Oh! no," answered Dudley, "if there is anything of importance to communicate."

"Well, I think there is."

"Come in, then."

## CHAPTER VI.

## A FRIEND'S OPINION.

DUDLEY GREY guessed pretty correctly what had kept Frank Amooore lingering at the gates of the Inn till his return. He knew the lecture that was in store for him, and how Frank Amooore would regard the position. He had lectured Frank in his day, proffered him wise counsel, talked a heap of worldly wisdom to him, and now it was the younger man's turn.

Dudley was unprepared, however, for the quick dash at the subject when they were face to face in his chambers, for the



excitement of Amooore, for the honest but hard plain-speaking which escaped him.

"Dudley, I did not think until to-night," he said, "that you were the man to lead a woman to ruin."

Dudley turned red, then very white.

"Neither am I," was his answer.

"If you have not gone to the bad, or dragged that poor girl to the bad, you must be close upon the brink," said Frank, "and I am sorry to think this of you after all the years of our acquaintance."

"You are a true moralist," answered Dudley, mockingly; "you allow nothing for extenuating circumstances, for the romance of the position, for a man seeking change or distraction out of the narrow groove in which society keeps him. You are hard on me, Frank; you should have known me better."

"I don't seem to have known you at all," said Frank, doubtingly; "yours is a character beyond my comprehension."

"I have done no harm," was the reply.

"Yes, you have."

Dudley did not relish his friend's persistency. It was exceeding the limits of the friendship which existed between them. Frank Amore took a view of the position which it was not possible he could comprehend, and acted and spoke upon the suppositions he had himself created. Dudley was in no mood to continue the argument. He was slowly but surely feeling himself aggrieved; all the more surely because he was conscious in his heart of the weakness of his own defence.

"Shall we dismiss the subject?" he said, coolly. "Will you allow me to have my own opinion in this matter as well as yourself."

Frank Amore regarded him earnestly. Here was a friend drifting rapidly away from the harbour, and he had no power to save him after all.

"I should have been glad to talk this

over with you," he said, "to tell you about the Bareblades, and what they say and think of you; but you are irritable to-night, and not yourself."

"No, I am not myself," said Dudley, moodily, almost despairingly, "and I never shall be again."

"My dear Dudley, it is not too late—say it is not," cried Frank.

"I don't say it is too late," he answered, "for I have done no harm to the girl, Heaven knows. I have found her a pleasant companion and a dear friend, and I have respected her always. But I am not happy with her, and I can't be happy without her," he added, with a burst of passion that broke down the self-restraint which he had endeavoured to exhibit.

"You don't mean to tell me you are in love with the girl?" cried Frank, in his amazement.

"I am, by God!" cried Dudley Grey.

He got up and walked about the room

like a wild beast in his den—here was some one to confess the whole grim truth to at last, and with no fear of the world which would judge him presently more harshly than he deserved.

“Dudley,” said his friend, “I am no saint; I don’t look at this affair from the mountain-top of my own self-righteousness, and I am sure you have been foolish rather than wicked. I should not have thought too much of a flirtation of this character, dangerous as it may be, only——”

“Only what?”

“Only there is your engagement to Geraldine.”

“Yes—I know,” answered Dudley; “there is the misery of it all.”

“You can’t love both the women.”

“Upon my soul I think I do, after their fashion,” said Dudley, with a hard laugh at his own confession.

“No—it must be either Geraldine or the shop-girl,” said the other, thoughtfully, “and

as you are engaged solemnly to the one, and cannot under any possibility marry the other, why the sooner you say farewell to the shop-girl the better."

"Yes—it is wise advice," Dudley replied, sorrowfully, "and if it was not breaking a girl's heart it might be done."

"Will you tell me what you mean to do?"

"I don't know," answered Dudley, helplessly.

"Be a man. Be the Dudley Grey whom I have always known," said the other, seizing his advantage; "save yourself and save the girl."

"Yes, I am going to do that, but——"

"But what?"

"But I must have time. I can't dash at her with a sledge-hammer, and crush every hope in her heart at one blow. I will not do that!" cried Dudley.

"You do not think of Geraldine in this matter," said Frank, "how she feels your absence, and becomes suspicious, jealous,

even, of the excuses which you are continually making to keep away from her."

"She can't suspect anything."

"She is unhappy, Dudley. You have been engaged to each other for so long a time. Only think what you are doing," added Frank, "how badly you are behaving to both women."

"Yes—that's true," replied his friend; "I haven't much of a defence to urge, and you are so clearly on the right side of the argument that I will not trouble you with my answer. I can only say again, I have done no harm."

"But harm must come, unless," he said, bluntly, "you drop it."

"I'll drop it," said Dudley; "I had made up my mind before you spoke to me."

The two men shook hands on the strength of Dudley Grey's promise, and set the subject aside, for that night at least.

They drank a glass of grog together, smoked a cigar, and parted the best of

friends, although the topic which might have wrecked the confidence and faith of these old school-fellows had been discussed with some heat. When Frank Amore had gone back to the hospital, Dudley thought it all over again in the solitude of his quiet chambers, and sketched out a feeble little plan or two, for the general peace of mind of everybody, without any great satisfaction to himself.

Was it too late? Had he gone too far, and was there never to follow happiness again? He was afraid so. He was afraid of Zeph—he did not see his way to confess to that faithful little woman that he had been a scamp from the first, and engaged to be married to another when he was professing his great affection for her. Not professing, for he was really and deeply in love, he was assured, and hence she had believed him and trusted in him. This was her reward—to be cast off as a something no longer worthy of his notice; to sink back

to her own poor sphere with a heart full of bitterness against such men as he ; to become desperate, or "go wrong," perhaps, out of revenge upon herself, as many women had done before poor Zeph's day. He felt already that she was not the girl to treat the matter lightly—to get over it with a few hysterical tears and a shrug of her shoulders at the folly of it all—he had not been frank with her ; he had never let her see one glimpse of a truth which might have put her on her guard, or separated her from him. There was the pity of it, and the cruelty and shame of it, and his confession was to come. Come it must, he knew now—there was no help for it. It would be one sharp wrench, and then all over for good—for very good, thank Heaven !

What life would be for a while without Zeph he did not clearly perceive, and he did not care to consider. He hardly knew himself how desperate a hold his passion had of him. He could not bear to think



of her beginning life afresh without him, of meeting her no more at the corner of the street wherein her place of business was, of seeing no more her face grow radiant at the sight of his,—at the consciousness that he was there again to take her into the bright world beyond the four walls of her work-room. He tried hard to think of Geraldine de Courcy instead, and of his pledge to her; of her love, and his honour, or the little semblance of honour that was left in him. He knew he did not love Geraldine now, but he did not think of giving her up, of telling her the whole truth of his infatuation, and asking for that liberty which her wounded pride would assuredly be willing to accord. He was as selfish as most men, possibly. He could bear the pain of separation from the woman he loved better than the ridicule which would be hurled at him and the object of his choice.

It was a stern sacrifice for him to give up Zeph, but he would rather his heart

bleed than his friends should laugh at him. Burke was right when he said there was only one passion—vanity !

Yes, Dudley Grey was very weak, one of those weak beings with which the world is overstocked unfortunately. He was far weaker than he knew, for meeting Zeph Carrington an evening or two later on, when he was full of the wise intention of telling her the truth, and asking her forgiveness for his duplicity, he hesitated once more and put off the day of his confession. She was so bright and happy, so intoxicated by the dangerous atmosphere in which every breath was drawn, that he could not tell her that night. He would tell her next time they met, he thought ; he would write to her the truth—he would do anything but own his folly then.

It was a mistaken kindness, and the last chance slipped by him.

## CHAPTER VII.

## WHAT THE OTHER SIDE THOUGHT OF IT.

SOME four or five days after Dudley Grey's last meeting with Zeph Carrington—his last time of "keeping company with her," as Zeph phrased it—and before the opportunity had presented itself to meet her again, the barrister was disturbed and surprised one afternoon by two visitors to his rooms.

They came slowly into Clement's Inn and up the common staircase of the house in which he lodged, and startled him at his desk by a solemn ponderous dab with the knocker outside. He rose, opened the

door, and stared at the two men, connecting them with an Old Bailey case which he had been studying of late days, until the consciousness that he was familiar with the features of the younger man dawned unpleasantly upon him.

"You know me again, Mr. Grey," said Ben, nodding his head towards him, but maintaining his stolid aspect. "I see you know me just as plain as I know you."

"Yes, I remember you," answered Dudley ; then he looked hard at Ben's companion, a short, thick-set man, with great grey whiskers hanging in a ragged, unkempt fashion from his cheeks. Dudley knew who he was also, before the fact was made apparent to him, although the face was hard and rugged and unlike Zeph's altogether. The man was in his factory dress, and had stolen an hour from his work to confront our hero in his home ; yes, Dudley knew who he was, and with what object he had come.

"This is Zeph's father," said Ben, by way of introduction.

"Indeed," responded Dudley, somewhat hoarsely. "Will you step inside? I hope," he added, slowly, "nothing has happened of any consequence to bring you here. Miss Carrington—she is well?"

"Something *has* happened," said Mr. Carrington in reply, and he and Ben followed Dudley into the room, "or I shouldn't have troubled you in this way, and without a warning like."

"Sit down," said Dudley; "don't hurry—take your time."

He did not wish to be hurried himself; it was he who wanted time to consider, to prepare for the crisis which had come to him at last, and which he was compelled to meet. He felt he must be on his guard, and not commit himself by any rash expression or promise to the father, with Zeph's old lover to bear witness to every word he

uttered. He felt even a little indignant, as though he had been led into a trap and without fair warning, until the puzzled, pained look of Mr. Carrington subdued all sense of rage in him, and changed it into fear.

It was a troubled face at which he glanced askance, and the first impression, that it was flushed with drink, gained strength with every minute of the interview.

"I haven't much time to spare, and I don't want to take up too much of yourn," said Mr. Carrington, "but I am uneasy in my mind, sir, and a word or two from you can set things straight, if they're ever to be straight again. Ben says they ain't."

"More they ain't," added Ben, in sullen chorus. "I know what men like him mean when they come after such girls as Zeph; we all know how that ends—we're not blind, any of us."

Dudley drew a deep breath.

"Will you tell me what has happened?" he said to the father.

"Yes, I will. Zeph has got the sack," replied Mr. Carrington.

"Discharged from her employment!" exclaimed Dudley.

"And through you. That's the hardest part of it, Mr. Grey," said the father—"through you."

"I cannot see how I have been the means of——"

"Oh, it's easy told," interrupted Mr. Carrington; "they found out at her business she wasn't going on well—so they put it, mind you—and that she went about with a gentleman—that's you!—to all kinds of amusement, coming home at all hours—which I know myself, having to sit up for her—and they told her—God damn 'em, what do you think they told her?" blurted forth the father.

"You need not repeat it," said Dudley; "I can guess what unjust folk would say to

a defenceless woman. But they are in the wrong—completely in the wrong, I give you my word of honour.”

“I don’t want it,” said Mr. Carrington, shaking his head to and fro in emphatic protest. “I don’t want anybody to tell me my girl isn’t a bad un. I know in all London there isn’t anyone with less vice in her than Zeph. That’s not it.”

Dudley Grey knew that was not it either ; it was not the depth and extent of the motive which had brought Zeph’s father to his room.

“She has chucked up the business. She did not care to be spoken to by the governors, and they said she’d better leave at once ; and,” added Mr. Carrington, “left she has.”

“I am sorry she has been so hasty as this,” Dudley murmured.

“Then me and her had some words, too, for I wasn’t best pleased with it all, and said more than I meant, as people do when



they're riled. And then," he continued, as he leaned forwards, planted one grimy hand on each of his corduroy knees, and stared with grave intentness at the barrister, "she up and told me everythink—who the gentleman was, and what he was, and where he lived; how he had been keeping company with her, oh! for ever so long, and was uncommon fond of her."

"And was going to marry her," added Ben, ironically.

"That's what I've called to ask about," said Mr. Carrington. "I told Zeph this morning I should come and talk to you straightforward like, and as man to man."

"What did she say to that?" asked Dudley, in a low tone.

"She said I might and welcome. She could trust you, she said, to tell the truth. She would have come with me, if I'd let her," he continued, "but I thought it was best for you and me to have this out together."

"Yes—no," said Dudley, irresolutely: "I wish she had come with you, I think."

"Why?"

"I could have explained the whole matter more clearly, perhaps," was his slow answer.

"What did I tell you?" growled Ben to his companion; "didn't I say so? Can't you see what his game's been? Haven't I said so all along?"

"I will not have your interference," cried Dudley Grey, fiercely, at last; "it is no business of yours."

"Oh, yes, it is," answered Ben, stolidly, but boldly; "for, you see, if you hadn't stepped between me and Zeph, she would have been my wife by this time. I wanted her to be. I liked her awful."

"Hold your row, Ben," said Mr. Carrington, "and let me speak. It is my place, not yours, to talk."

"Go it," muttered Ben; "but I ain't going to be told it's not my business."

“Let’s get to the rights of it, or the wrongs of it,” said Mr. Carrington—“that’s what I have come for, Mr. Grey. What am I to make out of all this?—that my daughter ain’t good enough for you, and never was? That you’ve thought it a fine thing to take her out and unsettle her for all our homely ways? That you’ve turned her head, and made her believe you’re desperate in love with her, and you’ve never meant it all the time? That you would have ruined her if you could, and told your swell friends afterwards you’d thrown another woman on the streets? That’s it, now; own it like the scamp you are!”

Dudley Grey winced beneath these hard words, and the shame of his position burned red into his face. He might have expected to be judged like this by one whose heart was in his child’s good name and fame. He was judged unmercifully, but it was natural the man should think in this way, and disbelieve any statement he might offer in

extenuation of his conduct: Extenuation ! it was beyond him. He made the attempt, however.

“Mr. Carrington, you do me an injustice,” he said ; “you think too badly of the position altogether. I have never had a thought against your daughter’s happiness—not one thought of doing her an injury. I have been very weak and foolish—your daughter has become a dear friend of mine—I have the most profound esteem for her ; I would die rather than a word should be breathed against her.”

“They are talking of her already—all the young women at the business, not one half of them as good as she is, are picking her to pieces ; they have torn her character to rags ; they will speak of her soon in our street, where the story will come round sharp enough. Now, you have done her all this harm, but you don’t say how you propose to set it right.”

“What can I do?”

"What Zeph told me you meant to do—what you have led her to expect all this while," said Mr. Carrington—"marry her."

"I would do it to-morrow, if it were in my power, but it isn't," said Dudley.

"Meaning you are married already, perhaps."

"No, I am not married. I am engaged. I—but I will write to your daughter—I will explain everything, and she will understand me and forgive me. For God's sake leave me," Dudley entreated. "I am wretched, don't you see that?"

"I don't care a damn for your wretchedness," said Mr. Carrington, bluntly—"what's it to me? What are you but a man who would have led my girl wrong, if you could?"

"On my soul, no!"

"'Pon my soul, yes!" cried Mr. Carrington; "these things don't stop when you like—it's all down-hill—and you meant to drag her into the ditch at the bottom. It's

the way of half of the devils of your sort, that skulk about the streets to disgrace poor girls, whose ignorance makes it easy work. I have had your answer."

"Not yet. I will write a letter to Zeph at once."

"Don't trouble yourself," said her father, "I should not let her read it. I can go home and tell her in half a dozen words she was wrong, and I was right, in what we said of you this morning."

"No, no, don't tell her anything—pray let me write to her," urged Dudley.

"Are you going to say you will marry her?" Carrington asked, as he rose.

"I am going to relate the whole story of my position—to explain to——"

"That'll do—I don't choose she shall see it, or see you ever again. Come, Ben, let us leave this *gentleman*," he said.

They walked slowly from the room; they went away without another word, and Dudley was thanking heaven for their departure,

when the flushed face of the father peered round the door again.

"I may as well tell you what I think of you before I go. I shan't be easy without," said Zeph's father.

"Spare me, please," replied Dudley, in feeble protest; "I think badly enough of myself, without your hard words. I know what you think of me, and have a right to think."

"I can't help saying—and I feel bound to say it—you've acted like an infernal scoundrel from the first. That's all." And, having expressed himself thus forcibly, Mr. Carrington went back with the news to poor Zeph.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“POOR ZEPH!”

YES, he would write to Zeph at once, thought Dudley. She would understand him better than the rest of them. He was judged too harshly by outsiders; the father in cruder language had only expressed the same opinion as Frank Amoire. All his own fault: he owned it, and he deserved it. What right had he to be judged a better and more honourable man than ninety-nine out of a hundred placed in a similar position? What proof was there existent that he would not have harmed Zeph Carrington? And how much evidence was there



that his course of action was not one of studied deception from the first?

Yes, he would write to Zeph.

He sat down before his desk and began ; but the task was more difficult than he had imagined. It was impossible to explain his long course of deception, and constitute his love as an excuse for it. He dared not set down on paper that he had loved her desperately and foolishly, but there had never been in his thoughts an idea of making her his wife. He could not register cruelly in black and white that her position was beneath him, her friends and home surroundings altogether low, and that he was engaged to be married to another woman at the time he had been raving of his affection for her. He was sure he loved Zeph passionately and unselfishly, and the sorrow at his heart for Zeph's sorrow was a weight which bore him down completely. He begged her not to judge him as her father had done ; to think of his trouble even ; to consider it was all

for the best that they were about to part ; and then the lines read so coldly and falsely that he ran his pen through them, and cursed the incompetency of expression by which he had been smitten.

He spent hours in writing letters, which he tore up as soon as he had written them, and finally he seized his hat and dashed into the fresh air in search of relief from the sick headache which oppressed him. But he could not remain in the streets with a letter unwritten which might bring a faint degree of solace to Zeph's heart, if he could only say all that was in his thoughts more earnestly. He returned to his chambers, lighted his lamp, and had recommenced his miserable task, when a strange, soft knock at his door thrilled him with a horror for which there could be only one reason. Zeph had come to see him, to denounce his perfidy with her own white lips ; to curse him for the blight which he had been to her life. He was sure it was she before he was stand-

ing in the doorway, looking out into the murky landing-place where Zeph was.

He had not been mistaken. She who came quickly towards him with her hands extended, and her anxious face uplifted for his kiss, was the poor little milliner who had altered his life and shipwrecked her own in trusting to him.

"Zeph, Zeph," he said, "you should not have come to see me here—you should have kept away, and waited for the letter I am writing to you."

"I could not wait, Dudley," she answered, listlessly. "What was the use of waiting? Let me come in and talk to you."

"But——"

"I am tired," she said. "I have been about the streets all day looking at the shops and the carriages. I must rest a minute, Dudley."

It was a pale, haggard face at which he gazed, and there was something so depressing and awful in her steady stare

at him that he hesitated still for her sake.

"I will come out with you," he said ;  
"we will walk together in the Inn."

"Did not you hear me say I was tired?"

"Yes ; but I should not like them to say  
you had come to my rooms," he said. "They  
may be watching you."

"Who are 'they'?" asked Zeph, shortly.

"Your father—your friends."

"Never mind them. They know," she  
added, with a short, hard laugh, "I am not  
too particular."

"Don't say that even in jest."

"And I know I can trust you, Dudley.  
You are not the man to injure me!"

"God forbid!"

"Then let me come in, for I am very  
ti——"

She reeled as she spoke, and would have  
fallen to the ground had it not been for his  
plunge forward, which saved her by clasp-  
ing his arms round her in his fright. He  
led her into his room, and whilst she sat in

the big library chair he had recently quitted, he mixed some weak brandy and water for her.

"Here, drink this," said Dudley. "You have overtaxed your strength to-day. You have been greatly worried and traduced. It would have been better to remain quietly at home."

"Home!" she echoed, sorrowfully; "I haven't any."

"Great Heaven! what do you mean?"

"Any that I care about, I should say," she answered, as she drank from the glass, which she set aside the instant afterwards with a visible shudder, and clasped her two ungloved hands tightly together in her lap.

"I am glad to see you, Zeph, for one reason out of many, although I would have preferred meeting you elsewhere," began Dudley. "I seem to have so much to say and to urge in my defence, if you will not reprove me too bitterly for all my weakness."

"I haven't any cause to reproach you, Dudley," she said, with a sad smile. "It is all my fault, not yours."

"No, no; that is not true," cried Dudley. "You are not to blame. I should have known better. I have deceived you cruelly, but I could not help it."

"We could not help it, either of us," said Zeph, staring at the carpet. "It was Fate, wasn't it? I believe in Fate."

"Tell me first about your quarrel with your employers. What did they say about you and me?"

"Oh! don't bother," said Zeph, in reply. "What does it matter?"

"You are not reckless, Zeph?"

"N—no," was the half-hesitating answer.

"You are resigned to our parting from each other? You see it is best for both of us?"

"Yes," she answered, slowly, "perhaps it is."

"You will believe, too—oh, Zeph! you

*will* believe—this is the bitterest day of my life. Don't think me a wretch and villain at any time. If it is not easy to forget me, don't think that," he cried.

"Did father say you *were* a villain?" she asked, almost unmoved by his excitement.

"Yes."

"Ah! he fancies so," she muttered. "When they told me at the business I was no better than I should be—when they told everybody that—he said it might be true, for what he knew. He's very hard on us both. He's not a good father, Dudley."

"Don't think too harshly of the father, Zeph," said Dudley. "He had a right to speak."

"He said a lot about you I don't take in yet," continued Zeph, with her old sharpness apparent for an instant; "and that you were engaged to be married, too. That's a lie, isn't it? If I'm too poor and common for you—if you have thought it over again, and seen the folly of it—I don't mind much.

I won't be, after a while, so very, very *down* at losing you. But there is no other lady anywhere, is there, Dudley? Do tell me that."

She had woke up from her apathy at last, and was regarding her old lover with eyes gleaming and wide; her face full of a craving to be convinced that Dudley had loved her in real earnest through it all.

"My dear Zeph, it is true enough," he stammered, "I am engaged to be married; that is the shame and the remorse of it to me."

"I—I didn't think it was so bad," Zeph murmured.

"It is."

"Then why did you come after me?" she asked, curiously. "Why could not you let me be? I had never done you any harm!"

The light died out of her face, and the grey shadows stole back to it and deepened in their tone.



"Oh! Zeph, I did not think it would come to this," said Dudley.

"I was happy in my way; it wasn't a good way, but laughing and talking at the Rooms didn't seem to matter much; but when you followed me, came to Keston," she added, thoughtfully, "met me week after week, night after night, made me your companion, took me everywhere, let me see you cared for me a little, why, what could I do but like you very much? Oh! my God! what could I do!"

Dudley knew not how to answer. There was a strong impulse upon him to clasp this young woman to his breast, to speak words of consolation and affection to her, to bid her consider herself from that time forth his affianced wife; it seemed the only fair and honest reparation he could make. Heaven knew he loved her better than Geraldine, that he had never loved Geraldine at all, and Zeph had been so great a happiness of late days that he had preferred

to lose his honour rather than lose her. But he was silent; the crisis had come, and it was wise policy to meet it firmly, though without the girl it seemed impossible that he should ever know happiness again.

"Courage, Zeph, courage," he answered, in a low voice.

She went on in the same half-absent manner, a woman asking questions of herself rather than of him.

"If I could only understand why you took so much trouble, spent so much time on me, talked of being fond of me—if I could only make it out!" she said; "but to go on like this, and then suddenly cast me off like an old glove, it's a riddle I can't guess; for it *was* all acting—wasn't it?"

"No, Zeph, it wasn't," he cried; "I never told you an untruth in my life. You were, and are, awfully dear to me; but for both our sakes we MUST say good-bye to each other."

"Now we are found out!" she added, "I

wonder what would have happened if nothing had been said about it?"

"I have been summoning courage to end this for weeks ; I have been miserable concerning you."

"Only for weeks. Ah!" with a heavy sigh, "it was too late then."

"Zeph, dear Zeph, it is not too late," cried Dudley ; "here is the turning-point of our lives. There is nothing for you to look back at with shame. You have been good and true and honest. You have no cause for regret ; the disgrace of it rests with me."

"I have been a fool," said Zeph, bitterly. "I thought I was going to marry a gentleman, and I was silly enough to trust him."

"I have not abused your trust, Zeph."

"Oh, you have respected me, you mean," said Zeph. "I wish you had not."

"Good God !"

"It would have put me on my guard, and I should have got away before I cared for you," said Zeph ; "I should have been

frightened and run. There, I don't intend this for a reproach, Dudley; I said I had not come to say a word against you—I didn't mean—forgive me. Now I know the truth," she said, rising to her feet, "I think I can say—good-bye—pretty well."

She turned greyer at the thought, however, and her eyes were full of that far-away look which had already scared him.

"You will go home, of course?" he asked.

"Yes; I will go home," she answered, wearily.

"Making it up with your father—settling down quietly—seeing very quickly, I hope, how wise we were to-night in parting thus."

"Oh! I see that already," she said, quickly—"don't you fear."

"And you will seek another situation at

on," she muttered.

give you occupation and relief

"My character is gone, and no one will have me."

"It is not gone. I will——"

"You will do nothing, please," said Zeph ;  
"I don't want to talk of this, or think of this just now. It is good-bye I have come to say, that's all ; and I *can* say it, and God bless you, too !"

"No, no ; God bless you, and forgive me," Dudley cried, folding her in his arms, and kissing her passionately for the last time in his life.

She returned his caress, put her arms round his neck softly for an instant, and then went away dry-eyed, and with a slow firm step. He watched her descend the stairs from the balusters, over which he leaned, but she did not look up at him again, although he cried good-bye to her once more, and she murmured back his words, an echo of despair that was deeper than his own.

When she was in the Inn again, and a

few paces from the house, she came to a full stop. She turned and looked at the light behind the window-blind of his room. Had she been struck into stone, she could not have remained more silent and rigid in the night shadows that were about her there.

It was her last look. The dark curtain would fall between them for ever after that, unless——! What would he say, what would he do, if she toiled up those stairs again and told him that she could not go away, and it was cruel now to send her away, after all that had happened? But she did not move towards him—she stirred neither hand nor foot until a hand clutched her arm suddenly and roughly.

“Ben!” she faltered forth, as she became aware that it was her old admirer standing by her, with his fierce white face peering into hers.

“Yes, it is Ben—and no mistake.”

“Have you been following me?” she

asked, with a quaver of indignation in her voice.

"I have," was the reply. "I told your father I'd hang about till you came. He said you wouldn't come here, but I knew better. I knew what it all meant. Oh! yes, it wasn't easy to humbug me."

"Well," she said.

"And you've been in there," he shouted. "I've counted all the time you've been planning with him what to do, now the whole trick's blown upon."

"I don't know what to do," murmured the helpless Zeph.

"You've settled it all, no doubt."

"And I don't care what becomes of me," she added. "I don't—really!"

"So that you get away from the gov'nor and me!" cried Ben. "Of course not. He's nothin', I'm nothin', and that feller's everythin'."

He shook his fist at the lighted windows of Dudley Grey's chambers.

"Shouldn't wonder if I didn't kill that man some day," he muttered, with an oath.

"Don't say that. It was all my fault."

"Oh! I don't excuse you," answered Ben.

"I don't ask you," she said, almost sharply, and in the old sharp way, and then the hollow voice came back again.

"Where's father?"

"Waiting for me to tell him where you've been."

"And you'll tell him?"

"I'll tell him you're all that's bad, or you wouldn't have gone in there. I wish I'd dropped down stone dead afore I'd seen you do it," he exclaimed.

"He'll believe I'm wrong now, won't he, Ben?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Ah! why shouldn't he?" she said.

"Good-bye."

"Ain't you coming home?" he asked, a little curiously.



"I shall be home presently. I promised Mr. Grey I would go home."

Ben gave vent to another oath at this, and Zeph turned slowly from him and went along the Inn towards the Strand. He did not attempt to follow her now; he went his own way, and in his own bitter spirit, to Mr. Carrington's house.


## CHAPTER IX.

## “THE MORAL OF THE STORY.”

THE weak, vain man who had once been so proud of his moral strength, was a stranger being than he was aware, or we have been able to depict to our readers in the faint sketch which we have attempted here. Although not an exceptional man, nor an uncommon specimen of humanity—only one of a sentimental order of beings who never mean ill and work more mischief than those bolder sinners who march triumphantly along the devil’s road as though it led to glory—Dudley was to an extent different from his class. He did not

breathe freely after his romantic folly had collapsed, and the parting had taken place, and all was over for good. He was a man who had not completely made up his mind to part with Zeph, he found out. He had been touched to the quick by her grief and love for him ; her despairing face haunted him still. He had shadowed her life for all time. He had taught her never to trust in his sex again, and he had set the tongues of scandal hissing at her with the worst construction of her dangerous acquaintance with him. She was so eccentric a girl that he was afraid of the result ; she did not look at life defiantly or proudly now ; he had struck down even her self-confidence ; he had driven her mad by his own cowardice and reserve ; she had been so good a girl until his sickly sentiment had turned her head.

The end had come, and they had said good-bye ! He was never to meet her again, to kiss her, to hear her crisp merry laugh



ringing like a peal of sweet bells in his ears, and her big eyes were never to light up again with pleasure at the sight of him. They would pass each other in the street presently, souls divided and drifting away.

If he should go back to her! It was infatuation—there was insanity in it! There was social suicide, the contempt and laughter of his own world—but there was Zeph wretched, and he loved her. Yes, he had played with fire until his wings were scorched, and the consciousness of her grief was already insupportable to bear. He could not be happy without her; he was sure of it. He should be utterly miserable with the woman to whom his honour was pledged, and make her life a misery. He could only brighten the life of the girl who had left him; he would do it, by the help of heaven, he would do his best at last!

What were class distinctions, and the howl of gentility at his defiance of them, to Zeph and Zeph's love for him? His mind was

made up an hour after she had left him—completely made up. He sat down and dashed off a few wild lines to Geraldine, acknowledging his unworthiness, surrendering his claim to her, referring her to Frank Amoore for the explanation of his conduct, for which he begged forgiveness very earnestly, and then he went out into the streets and dropped his letter into the pillar-box with a strong firm hand.

“Thank God, I have made up my mind,” he said. “I do Geraldine more justice by resigning her and accepting her scorn of me, and I save my dear, dear Zeph all further bitterness.”

He walked up and down the street considering this; he had no intention of returning to his chambers yet; he was unsettled, but far happier in his mind than he had been of late days.

Why had he not done it before, he wondered now, and saved all the heart-burning and all the pangs of conscience by which he

had been beset? Why had his miserable pride stood in the way of making Zeph happy? And he had coolly thought of loving one woman and marrying another! Thank God, he could change Zeph's life as in a fairy-tale by the potent spell of his honest heart-felt words, and Zeph's father and friends, and even Ben, would become tolerable in time. If he lost caste, he should have done his duty, and he should be content in his lower estate—nothing could be more certain than that—with Zeph Carrington loving him so well. He would proceed immediately to Zeph's father's house and recover lost ground as soon as possible. He would bring the smiles back to that poor white face of Zeph's, and there should never be anything save peace and rest upon it again. She was sitting at home, miserable and despairing, and he must hasten with the news that he loved her too well to say good-bye to her. That was not a parting for ever which had occurred a little while

ago in his dusty room at Clement's Inn—only a scene in a comedy, leading up to this, and they would look back at it presently and smile at their fears and regrets as at an interesting love-story that had ended pleasantly. She would make him a good wife; she was an affectionate, tractable, docile girl, shrewd enough to catch quickly the manners and customs of society, never a woman of whom he should feel ashamed. A month or two with him would make a lady of her, and those who knew her history even would not marvel at his choice. There was more real love in the world than sceptics asserted, and so much the better for the world.

He strode on with his brain full of thoughts akin to these until, at the corner of a cross street on his way to Zeph's house, he came to a full stop. A stone's throw distant from him rose the huge brick front of a metropolitan hospital, and there Frank Amore worked in the good cause and

dreamed of future fame in a world of surgery.

He should not have thought of Frank Amoire on that occasion had it not been for the knots of idlers about the doors and on the pavement and in the roadway, and in noticing them his friend came to his mind. He would tell Frank what a revolution had occurred in his thoughts, and what a better man he had become as by a miracle. It would not take five minutes to relate, and he should be amused, actually amused, by Frank's stare of incredulity and astonishment. This Amoire was a man of the world, cool, calculating, and high-principled; what would he say to him in the face of a resolve from which nothing could turn him? Frank would tell him he had acted very unwisely—everybody would tell him that—but he could say never again he was behaving badly to both women, and leading the poorer on to her ruin. Frank would talk in his worldly-wise style for a time, but

4



he would thaw by degrees from the inner warmth of his heart, and wish him at last every happiness in his choice. And presently—Dudley actually laughed at the idea, so full of life and light thoughts was he now that an honourable course of action lay before him—Frank Amooore would begin to pay attention to Geraldine de Courcy, and marry her in good time, and live happily ever afterwards, though he would never know what was the deep happiness of an unselfish passion like his own. That would be reserved for one who had sunk his best chances to save breaking the heart of a girl in a back street.

He crossed to the hospital and paused again. Perhaps Frank was busy. There had been "a case" in during the last few minutes, and the crowd had not dispersed yet. Jackson, the porter, was chasing one or two boys down the steps as Dudley went towards him. Dudley Grey was well known as a visitor to the surgeon's quarters, and

the porter touched his hat as he came up.

"Is Mr. Amoores in?"

"Yes, sir."

"And busy, perhaps?"

"No, sir, not at all."

"Oh, I thought by the crowd——"

"I suppose they're waiting for the body to come out again—for they've brought it in an hour too late—that's all. They've no right," said the porter, very much aggrieved, "to keep bringing their stale stiff uns here. We can't cure them things."

"We couldn't help it, I s'pose," growled a surly-looking man in a blue serge jacket, who stepped from the hospital as the porter spoke; "I'll swear she breathed when Bill and I fished her out of the water."

"You'd swear to anything," said the porter, laughing with the easy complacency of a man accustomed to tragedy toiling up the broad stone steps all day. "I suppose you heard her dying speech and confession too, and what she did it for?"

"That's easy guessing," muttered the man; "it's all one tale that takes gals to the river."

"Ay, that's true," said the porter, "and—"

"Let me pass," said Dudley, pushing by them roughly. "Where's Amooore?—I must see him. Don't stand in the way. I——"

He dashed into the great central hall where a few students were congregated, and some hard-featured working-men were preparing to depart with their draped and rigid burden to the parish dead-house. Frank Amooore was crossing the hall in haste, when his friend screamed forth his name. The young surgeon paused, turned very pale, and came to him with an angry frown upon his face.

"Good God, Dudley, why have you followed on like this?" he asked, sternly. "What's the use of it—save to attract attention, and make more misery and scandal?"

"It is, then—it was—" Dudley could say

no more, but remained dumb and horror-stricken, with his hand pointing to the litter which the men were raising to their shoulders.

"Yes—it was the girl you called Zeph," said the surgeon. "What did I tell you long ago?"

Over-wise folk are proud of their prophecies, and it is a moment of triumph when they can shout forth to the weaklings, "What did we tell you?" But this vain, weak, wilful Dudley Grey had closed his eyes at the mention of Zeph's name, and dropped like a dead man at the feet of his friend.

"Don't press round too much, gentlemen," said Amooore, bending over Dudley at once, and waving back the students, "it's a little shock to the system. A mere faint—that's all. Unfasten his necktie; he will be better in a minute." Then he looked round in a scared and excited way himself, and waved his hand towards the group of

bearers in the background. "Take *it* away—quick!"

And, as Dudley Grey came to himself, and glared into the face of his friend, poor Zeph was carried out into the night.

**LOVE ON FOUR WHEELS.**



## LOVE ON FOUR WHEELS.

---

WELL, sir, I've spelt it all over in a variety of ways, and I've come to the conclusion that it was a Call. I don't mean one of those nasty things that they advertise in the noosepapers as a substitoot for life-belts, but a Call clean off the ranks, or out of the ranks, if you choose to look upon it in that light. And this is how it was, sir—in the Christmas-time, too, which makes it a proper sort of story for this time of the year, you see. To begin with, then, I was the only cab to be found—the only cab that had turned up for ever



so long, the porter at the station told me, with a good deal of bad langwidge, to which I was pretty well used, and even dealt in largely on my own account. It's no good mincing matters about what *I* was at that time of my career—for the perlice knew it, and the charge sheets at the station proved it, and the back of my licence had been specially 'dorsed in a neat round hand in order to catch the eye of the next official who might be curious enough to ask to see it. In fact, sir, and to make a clean breast of it, I was about as bad a cabby as ever trundled his four-wheeler within the radius, and out of it—I was a wampire-cabman, who preyed upon his customers, and was fond of rum. I was an aboosive cabman, too, and let 'em have it hot and strong if they tried it on with me with their trumpery fares to the measly tanner, and nothink over, except a yard or two belonging to the next mile, which the stingy beggars wanted to argy on to their side of the account. For

we have lots of close-fisted 'uns, or near 'uns, or hard 'uns, I can tell you—they're not all angels that wants driving home—and I ain't been allers in the wrong, though tolerable often, p'raps, if you tot me up, day after day, and calkylate my fines at Bow Street and other cribs of that kind. I never took less than my fare. I'm 'shamed to say I took a great deal more once of a confused genelman from a City dinner, who gave me suverins for shillings—and the way in which I've bullied the defenceless sex, when aged and borne down by parcels, brings the blush to my leather cheeks to think of now.

Why I went out that partikler Boxing Night, I've never been able to properly understand. I had had a good day of it, and a fairish lot of stim'lant—though I wasn't in any way unfit for business, as many of 'em were—I was never industrious, and I lived werry much from hand to mouth, and generally with a glass in my

hand—I was fond of my holidays in bar-parlors, on holiday occasions. I had lots of pals who wouldn't have gone out a Boxing Night to drive the Queen of England home from the pantermine; I had even a friend at the door of the Swillchester, who had promised to pass me in when the company had settled down, and Mr. MacHowler had begun his pop'lar war-whoop; and Bill Chumps had asked me to his private sing-song down at Stepney. But for some reason or other—I say now it was a Call!—I got my horse and cab from Bones's yard, and trundled off to business about half-past nine at night. I remembers that I was in a misantropical mood—I had been fined last week forty shillings, or a month—"the money was paid," the papers said, and I read it with pride, though I should have to pay it back in bits and with interest to that screw of a Bones—but it was a bitter night, and snowing hard, and too early for the theayter, and yet out I went, bang off to

the Great Nutthorn, or thereabouts rather—for I was not allowed to pick up fares inside the Company's property—oh! no—not 'arf good enuf for 'em, sir, Lor' bless you—no!—though they would have gone down on their knees, the whole direction, if I had come in that night, and helped 'em. I was in an aggerawating mood—I often was at that time with only half my reg'lar quantity of rum in me. I didn't go on the rank, but drove along the Eustin Road, and then back agin to King's Cross, and couldn't see anyone who hailed me, and was "engaged" to everybody who wanted to ride partikler, and would have an answer out o' me. This was my rewenge on society—I often did it—it was my orte sperit to refuse their fares and cut 'em dead. Hadn't they fined me forty bob?—didn't the Beak think that I shouldn't have the money, and be obliged to do my month?—hadn't they worried me about my number, and measured the distance wrong, and told

a lot of lies about my being imperent, and backed the blooming licence?—why should I take anybody that pleased to shriek out “Hi!” to me? Let ’em “Hi!”—I was blind and deaf, and I wanted a good big fare, and exactly in the direction I was going presently—which was Stepney way, to Bill Chumps’s sing-song—and I wasn’t in a hurry, if other people were.

Well, it rained and snowed and froze all at once in fine style, and the people in the streets were looking as nice and miserable as they could look, when I thought I’d turn the corner of Muffler Street, and draw up on the quiet side of “The Royal Veteran,” and have just arf a quartern of Jamakey. I had nearly finished, and was wishing the landlady a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, and telling her that I was bound to Stepney presently, when in bounced a perliceman and a railway porter, jest as if the place belonged to ’em.

"Is that yer cab outside?" asked the perliceman.

"Yes, it *is* my cab," I said.

"Then you ought to be in charge of it."

"Oh! ought I?"

"And come out."

"Wery well—I'm coming out."

"There's a fare waiting for you at the station," said the porter. "I have been looking for a cab these ten minutes—come on."

"Where's the fare want to go?"

"Peckham. She's——"

"I'm engaged for ten minutes past ten to drive an old gent to Bedlam," I said, a little too ironical; for I don't think they believed me; "and I'm sorry I can't take her."

"Oh! that won't do——"

"And I'm sorry I can't take her," I said again, when I was firm upon my box; and away I druv, despising them both. I heard the perliceman call out, "I know you,

Jonas Pledge," but I didn't mind his knowing me; and, if I was engaged to take up another fare to Bedlam, what business was it of his? I wasn't on the rank, or plying for hire, was I?

I heard the porter say, "Poor little gal!" too, which was the fare to Peckham he would have let me in for, I s'pose; wot was a poor little gal to do with me? I wanted rich gals, and old 'uns, and unpertected 'uns in my wehicle, if I carried any gals at all. "Poor little gal," indeed! I quite laughed at the notion when I had got out of sight and hearing of 'em.

Presently I turned. A boy was tearing along the roadway after me, and I nearly run him down at fust.

"Hi! cab—you're wanted. 'Old 'ard—wait a bit."

"Who wants me?"

"A large party—at the station—mother and kids from York—going to a ball—Stepney—oh, haven't I run!"

"Stepney—are you sure they said Stepney?"

"Swear they said Stepney," was the reply. "You ain't engaged?"

"No. Jump on the box—they'll give you sumfink for fetching me, to-night."

"They've promised me a shillin'."

"That's liberal—I shall want a drink out o' that."

"Right you are, guv'ner," said the boy.

Off we went to the station and to the arrival platform, where the guards were, and one or two perlicemen, and a girl in black sitting on a thumping wainscot box, with iron clamps at every corner of it. I knew one of the perlice again, I knew the porter; I saw the boy wink at both of 'em and laugh, and I knew that I was sold—clean done for; and at my age, too, thirty-two and a arf, and with my eggsperience. This was the "poor little gal." I was sure of it before a word came out of their grinning mouths.



"He ain't engaged, he says," shouted the boy.

"I said I was engaged; but if the fare warn't more than a mile——"

"Come, come; that won't do here," said the perliceman; "we can't have any of that nonsense. Give me your number, and give this lady a ticket, and take her to Lauristina House, Circumambient Terrace, Peckham Rye; and look sharp about it, Pledge, or you'll hear from us again."

"This is a pretty sort of go," I muttered.

"If you ain't afraid of him, there's your cab," said the porter to the lady; "but make sure of his number, and let 'em know at Scotland Yard if he's sarcy, or asks too much. His fare is exactly two-and-six; but you might spring another sixpence, as it's a bad night, and if he's civil; but he does not deserve it for all that. You are sure you are not afraid to go with him?"

"No," said the girl, looking at me steadily;

"I don't think he would do me any harm."

"I'm not going to hurt you, or to eat you," I replied.

I was not particickerly perlite over the job ; but somehow—and odd it is to think of now—I was already softened by the sight of one of the prettiest little faces that mortal man ever clapped his eyes on. She was certainly the prettiest little woman *I* had ever seen—and one sees a lot of women in thirty-two years, if you look about you properly—and she wasn't happy, but seemed as if she'd been a-crying a good deal. And she wasn't what you would call a real lady—that is, a swell lady, with a house of her own to drive to,—but something like a trim, nicely-dressed, neatly-built little bit of a servant maid, who was going to her new place, and had the whole of her property in that box which they were lumping on to my roof. And that's exactly what she was, which shows that I was a man of hobserwa-

tion, with a hawk-like penetration anyhow.

She got into the cab and forgot all about my number, which I did not remind her of, for many of these fares get in like lambs, and turn out like raging tigeresses when it comes to settling up. I thought I might as well be cautious. But the perlice looked at my badge, and the porter booked the number of my cab behind, which was a mean perceeding, though I pretended not to see him.

"Wot's the address?" I said to my fare.

"Mrs. Botherton's, Lauristina House, Circumambient Terrace, Peckham Rye," she said. "I have it written here upon a card."

"Give it me presently, if I ask you for it. Is this terris near the 'Kentish Drovers'?"

"I never was at Peckham. I don't know any drovers."

"Oh, ho!" I said, with a laugh at her innersence that didn't do me any harm. She leaned out of the winder and thanked the porter and the perliceman and the boy, who

looked as pleased as if she'd given them arf-a-crown apiece; and then we went out of the station, and slowly along the greasy Gray's Inn Road.

Good gracious! it *was* a-snowing and a-blowing and a-freezing when we turned into the open street; it was a precious sort of night to go off to Peckham Rye, when one had built upon a fare Stepney way—and the road all ice, too, and the 'orse not so firm upon his hoofs as he had been eighteen or twenty years ago.

The little good humour that was in me, or had come out of me at the sight of the young woman in the cab, soon froze up with the weather, and I thought of the hardships of my life, and the distance, and of Bill Chumps's sing-song at Stepney, until I was in a wus temper than afore.

We got to Peckham Rye somehow—we didn't walk or trot there—we *slithered*. Once or twice I tried to look through the frost on the winder-panes to see how my

fare was taking it, and she seemed taking it uncommon easy, with herself screwed into a corner fast asleep. She didn't seem to care that I was going clean out of my way to oblige her, and had to get back to Stepney—not she, indeed. Whoever did think of a cabman's feelings—or fancied that he had got any!

There was a perliceman in the road at last, and I pulled up and asked if he knew Circumambient Terrace. He did know, or he pretended he did—these Bobbies are allers so awful clever!


I had another mile to go—that was my luck, of course—and the Circumambient wasn't on the Rye—what hignorant hassess people are with their haddresses!—but in one of the new roads at the back of the Rye, where all the building was going on by wholesale. He couldn't exactly remember the exact spot, but I should find another officer further along, and *he* could put me in the way, as it was on his beat.

But that other "officer," as he called him, the conceited cus! was too wise a man to do more duty than he could conveniently help on Boxing Night, and I'm in a condition to swear now that he was nowhere on his beat. I don't blame him for making hisself comfortable somewhere, if there was a cook with a feeling heart down a Peckham airy, but I felt his loss uncommon. For he *was* nowhere about, and if I went down one new street, bumping and jolting along roads that would have been a disgrace to the army in Zulu-land, I went down a hundred all exactly alike, all arf finished, arf of 'em unlighted, none with human beings to be seen about, and not even a cat or a dog alive in 'em.

Of course I lost myself—I had never been further than the Rye afore, and it was cross country to me, and no mistake. As for getting hinformation from anybody, that was as much out of the question as if I'd been driving about the back slums of the

South Sea Islands. I pulled up at no end of houses where the lights were behind the blinds as if the folks were up and lively, and those who did answer the knock—they weren't many of 'em—gaped at me open-mouthed, and had never heard of such a place. All but one old man who kept a chandler's shop and potted-lobster factory; he knew all about it—he was another of your wise 'uns, he was! I had come out of my way—I could have told him that—oh! I was ever so much out of my way! If I took six turnings to the right, and then crossed a field—oh! he forgot I had a cab with me, and there was only a swing gate—well, if I went round the field, and got to the back of Hoggins's Chapel, and then went straight on till I came to Smith Street, I should see Circumambient Terrace marked up.

Which I never did that extrornary night, I will take my solemn oath on. I never found the Terris; to make my story



short, it was beyond all my powers in the dark, and with nobody about. The fare, when she woke up, got hi-sterrikal, and narvous. I fancy she remembered the warning at the railway station, and thought p'raps that I had done it on purpose "to pay her out" for having to carry her against my will. And I was dead beat and frost bit—and so was Bones's knacker.

About three hours after we had left King's Cross we were in a Lord forsaken street at one in the morning, with two wheels of the cab in the ruts of the roadway, and the others on what the parish called a path and kubstone. We had stuck fast, and the horse wanted to lie down. My fare had lowered the winder, and was looking out pale and skeered, and my heart went clean into my boots at the sight of her distress, and I was full of sympafy for her again. Which *was* odd—which makes it more like a Call than ever—for I was wild and hard and savage enuf the moment afore, and could have



bullied my own mother, if I had had her handy.

“Cabman, where are we?”

“Blest if I know—blest if I’d care if it wasn’t for you.”

“Oh! dear, what shall I do? What will they think at my place, and my coming there at this time of night?”

“Coming there—why, we ain’t there, are we?”

“Can’t you get on any further?”

“I don’t think I shall ever be able to get off this kub—the wheels is wedged somehow—p’raps somebody will come by presently and help me with a shove!”

“Can’t I help you?”

“Oh! lor—no. Sit still and be happy.”

“But the cab’s all on one side.”

“It won’t go over.”

“Where’s my box?”

“That’s pretty straight—it’s froze up there perpendikley.”

And so it had, too!

With all her fright, she laughed quite sudden at this, and I was glad to see her in better spirits.

"Do you know, I think you've done your best to find Mrs. Botherton's."

"'Pon my soul, I have!"

"Then I won't cry any more. I'll try to bear up—but oh! dear, what a dreadful place London is!"

"This bit of it isn't lively, certainly. Do you mind putting that winder up?"

"Why?"

"'Cos you'll catch your death of cold; and I'm going to run to the corner of the street to see if I can find anybody."

"You won't be very long, Mr. Cabman?"

"Why?"

"Because I don't feel safe in this dark street without you."

"Lor' bless you, almost the first Bobby you meet will tell you you're safer without me, by a long chalk."

"The first what?"

"Oh! never mind. What a gal you are to ask questions. I'll be back in five minnits. You won't find anybody about to-night, I'm sure."

"I hope not. But don't be long away."

It was odd for this country lass to be anxious about me, or for anybody to be anxious about me, for the matter of that. I hadn't had a soul to care for me, believe in me, say a good word for me for fifteen years or more—I don't say that it wasn't my fault—and the idea of anybody wanting to see me again after I had once turned my back upon 'em—more pertikler a fare—was most astonishing. I went away, thinking of this; I stopped at the corner of the next street to think of it again. I came back, without finding anything but half-built houses, scaffold poles, snow and frost, but I thought of it all the way to the cab and Mary Daykin. That was her name, I found out soon afterwards, and a werry pretty name it was.

I found Mary Daykin and the cab on one side, and the horse anyhow, just as I had left the three of them. She had been looking out for me, too.

"Oh! what a time you've been away," she said.

"Of all the infernal roads and streets—of all the——"

"Please don't swear," said Mary, "only take me to Mrs. Botherton's, Lauristina House, Circum——"

"I shall swear orful, if you mention that beastly terris again. Can't you sleep?"

"Oh, dear, no."

"Then come out of the cab, and I'll see if I can move it."

Mary did so.

"Shall I take the horse out of the shafts?" she asked.

"You!"

"I understand horses. My poor father was a coachman at York before he died."

"Was he, though? Almost in my line, eh?"

"He drove the bus for the Biffin Hotel for ten years."

"I drove a bus once."

I drove into a gentleman's carriage, and peeled the veneer and varnish off the tune of six pound four, and was sacked at a moment's notice, too, but I did not tell her that. All that was in my happy days, afore I took to rum.


"How strange," she said. "Ah! my poor father was very much respected."

I wasn't. But I did not tell her that, either.

"And many a time in the stable-yard—we had rooms over the stable—he taught me how to harness the horses."

"Ah, I think for all that we'd better let the animal be—if we take him out he'll be on his knees in a jiffy."

"But——"



"And as for stopping here, or letting you stop in this"—I did swear here; I couldn't help it—"street any longer, blarmed if I do."

I made a dash at the cab, and a wrench at the front wheels. I gave a sudden plunge with my whole body at the vehicle, and, crash, crash, the fore wheels came off the axle-tree, and the whole thing was smashed up, and done for. It kept its upright position, though it looked more like a Bath chair than a four-wheeler, and the girl's box stuck on the roof hard and fast, which was the only thing about the frost that night that there was anything to be grateful for.

"Oh! my—oh! the poor horse!" said Mary Daykin.

Not that there was anything the matter with the poor horse, except weakness and cold in the stummick; he wasn't hastonished; he was dead and deaf to all emotion;

he didn't even look round to see what had happened; he might have been wondering what had become of his nose-bag, which I had forgotten was under the seat till that moment.

"What's to be done now?" said Mary.

"There was the rub down," as the man says at the theayter. The position was getting mixed. What was to be done? What was to become of me, and especially of Mary Daykin, I couldn't quite make out.

"Can't you think of anything to do?" suggested Mary Daykin, piteously.

"Well, if you'll allow me to get out of hearing, and have a damned good swear, I think I might pull my faculties together."

"Oh, don't talk like that," said Mary; "what good will that do?"

"I've found it answer afore now."

"Not that. Oh, I'm so sorry for your cab too."

"You'd better be sorry for old Bones, though the infernal rascal knew this cab

wasn't stronger than a box of lucifers when he sent it out to-night. He——"

"I shall get the horse out of these shafts, at any rate."

And, by George, sir, before I could stop her, she had done it, and the animal didn't fall down, as I thought he would, but looked round for his nose-bag, as much like a human critter as ever you saw in your life. We put him on his supper, and then I, at Mary's wish again—if ever there was a thoughtful, good-tempered little woman, it was this one—took him out of the cold into one of the half-finished houses opposite, where the basement floor made a reg'lar stable for him.

When I came back, Mary Daykin was in the cab, sitting all aslant, but quite content and patient.

"I've got here out of the cold, Mr. Cabman, if you don't mind."

"If I don't mind!" I exclaimed—"that's the only place you can get to yet a while,



unless you'll do a run with me round the streets, and see if we can find that cussed terriss."

"I shouldn't care to leave my box."

"Is there much in it?"

"Not a great deal, but it's all I have in the world."

"I don't think anybody could make off with it easy," I said; "but we're a foot deep in snow now, and you'll get your feet wet. Besides, I don't believe there is such a terriss, or such a house, or such a name as Botherton."

"Oh! my gracious!"

"You've been 'oaxed—we've both been 'oaxed."

"I don't believe there's anybody bad enough in all the world to play me such a trick. I," she added, "don't know anybody who dislikes me."

"I warrant you don't," I said, "and we won't think it a 'oax till the daylight. For I'm blowed if we won't have to stop here till

the daylight, unless I can find the place or another cabby. And that's what I'm going to do now."

"It's very kind of you to take all this trouble, and I shan't forget it."

"Thankee."

"What's your name? I don't like to keep on saying 'Mr. Cabman.'"

"My name's Pledge. Wot's yours?"

She told me, and that is how I came to know the name of Mary Daykin.

I left her in search of the terriss, and I had a run round the houses without finding it or anybody. She hoped I wouldn't go too far and lose myself, and her, and the horse, who was the best off of the three of us, and I turned up in twenty minnits, and tapped at the glass to let her know I was there.

"What a time you have been, Mr. Pledge!"

"Haven't you been to sleep?"

"No."

"Try and have a nap while I make for the high-road. Perhaps, if I get there and shout, somebody will hear me."

And off I went agin, but I might as well have tried to find the North Pole as the high-road, or any road but these new buildings. I was clean lost. I tried a shout or two, but it was no use, and I came back to Mary Daykin, with no good news to cheer her up.

Meanwhile Mary Daykin had an idea—bless her innersent little heart, she was from the country indeed.

"Don't you think, Mr. Pledge, if you were to knock up somebody at the houses that are occupied—we have passed one or two—they would take us in till the morning, and give us something to eat and drink?"

"I think they wouldn't myself," I said, "and I think we should get into trouble for waking people up too. But if you like to leave the box——"

"No; I won't leave my box," said Mary, very firmly, "only with you," she added, "if you'll mind it while I run round."

"You'd lose yourself in arf a minnit, child," I said; "there, try and go to sleep agin—I'll have another spin."

And away I went for the third time; and, by Jingo, it *was* a spin! I lost myself instead of her this time—lost my way clean, and could not find her for hours—goodness knows how many—or where I walked, and how I went round and round this beastly neighbourhood of bricks and mortar, underdone back streets, and sloshy fields and roads, with the snow going it all the time, and no human being about that dirty night. I began to think it must be a dream, when I turned into the right street at last, and saw the fragments of my cab all of a heap in the road, just as I had left them, only the snow was thicker on the roof, and there was a perliceman—a real live perliceman—at the cab door, talking to Mary Daykin.

As I came up, I heard the perliceman say—he was a young, red-faced, but not a bad-looking Peeler—

“Yes, that’s the man I thought.—Oh! you’ve come back at last, have you?” he said, addressing me.

“Did you think I was going to run away?” I asked.

“I didn’t,” said Mary Daykin; “I knew I could trust you, Mr. Pledge.”

“Ah! Pledge is the name,” said the perliceman; “you were at Kennington Lane Police Court, three weeks ago.”

“How do you know?”

“I heard the case. I’ve heard a dozen cases with you in ’em.”

“You’re lucky.”

All my bad temper came back at the sight of that man, or at hearing him let out my little faults to Mary Daykin. She was nothing to me but a fare, after all—never likely to be; but somehow I didn’t want her

to know that I'd been a bad 'un all my life a'most. And I didn't want her to turn agin me—even for a quarter of an hour, which I calkylated might be the end of our acquaintance.

“The sooner you're rid of this fellow, the better,” he went on. “He might have robbed and murdered you in this street, and nobody the wiser—only I come down it once an hour.”

“Wot a liar!” I exclaimed; and then I seized my advantage here. “He can tell a good one, he can,” I added; “why, we've been here since one o'clock. Who's going to believe what you say!”

“Well, I say this—that you've come down the wrong turning purposely. There's no good saying you don't know your way about these parts, because you do—and I shall book the case and take your number.”

“Book away, and take what you like,” I said.

"And if I have any more impercence, I shall lock you up. You've been drinking, and you weren't fit to drive."

I didn't answer. I knew it was uncommon easy to make a case out of this. I thought how I had been booked and entered and warned at the Great Nutthorn—and how the licence would go for good or bad, and for ever—after this unlucky night.

"It's a bad case, and you'll be summoned in the morning," said the Bobby.

"Summon and be——"

"Don't answer him!—oh! don't look so wicked as that," cried Mary, "you haven't done any harm—you've been all that's kind and thoughtful, and you couldn't help the accident. And he shan't say a word against you, Mr. Pledge, while I can be your witness."

"Gord bless you, young woman," I burst forth. I couldn't help it, but the tears came up into my eyes, for the first time in all my cabman's life.

"Oh! If *you* haven't anything to say against him—if you're satisfied—that's a different thing—but he *is* a bad 'un, and it's lucky I've come round to help you."

"He's not a bad one!" cried Mary, with her pretty face all aglow in my defence.

Think of that now—in *my* defence!

"And what are you squatting in that cab for?" said the perliceman, turning upon her suddenly, like the wiper that he was. "If you've been a-setting there since twelve you ought to be ashamed of yourself, with Circumambient Terrace the first turning to the right."

"What!" cried Mary.

"Wot!" cried I.

"The first turning to the right—just round the corner. Oh! you know well enough," said the perliceman to me.

"Here, come in—help me to carry the box—if you're a man and a brother—and let us have the young woman out of this mess."



"I'll keep an eye on the box till you send somebody round to fetch it," said the policeman.

"No—I won't leave it with you," said Mary, very firmly; "I can't trust you. That's my box, and I won't lose sight of it."

"I'm sure he won't run away with it," I said.

This was ironical, for two of us could have hardly managed that; but the man brightened up as at a compliment.

"I'll help you," he said, and he did when Mary had got out of the cab. And a rare tough job it was, hauling down that frozen box; we both got red and hot and werry much strained over it, and it came away all of a run down hill at last, and drove one of its iron corners through the policeman's helmet, and shaved off three big buttons from his uniform.

It was six o'clock when our little party of three went up the front steps of Lauristina House—a very little house in Circumambient

Terrace—and knocked at the front door. We didn't expect to be let in easy at that hour ; but the door opened at once, and an old lady quite dressed, and with a night-cap on, stood in the passage holding a candle in her hand.

“ Oh ! you have come,” she said, as mild as milk itself. “ I thought the trains would be a little late on Boxing Night.”

That old gal must have been an angel in disguise, I thought at first, but she had only been fast asleep in her chair all night, sitting up for her new servant, and did not know the time.

“ If you please, Mrs. Botherton, the cab broke down, and——” began Mary.

“ Yes, yes, tell me to-morrow,” she said, more snappishly ; “ you're letting all the cold into the house. Pay the cabman and 'come in, do.”

“ Oh ! dear, I don't know how to pay you—for everything,” said Mary, bewildered like as she took out her little purse.

"The fare's arf-a-crown, and you might spring a sixpence more as it's a bad night, and if I've been civil," I muttered.

"Ah! that's what the man said at the railway station, but——"

"The fare is about arf-a-crown," said the perliceman. "I wouldn't give him more, miss; it's his own fault if he comes out with a shaky cab."

"But," began Mary again, "he has been so good, and kind, and thoughtful; he has——"

"I'll make my bill out, and call to-morrow," I said, huskily; "I'd rather not take any money now, please."

And I didn't. I turned away, but she called me back.

"Very well. Think over what I owe you, Mr. Pledge, and please shake hands with me and let me thank you."

"No, not now; to-morrow."

I shook hands, and she said—odd enough that was, too, to say it—

"You're not a bad one, as he thinks, and I never will believe it."

"Thankee—thankee."

I went away, and the "to-morrow" never saw me in Circumambient Terrace. Nor the next, nor the day after, nor the week after those days, nor the month after that week. I didn't want to see her just then, and as I was just then, and I didn't want her money. I was not going to take three shillings from Mary Daykin—somehow I liked to think, and I was proud to think, that I had been of help to her without a bit of money for it. After all, I had done nothing but break down in a back slum, and keep her there miserable for hours, so the pride was took out of me by degrees, and I was left to wonder how she was getting on, and whether she ever thought of me, and still was sure I couldn't be a bad un.

When I was quite sure that I wasn't a bad un, I meant to go round to Circumambient Terrace, and show myself again; but I

wasn't certain how long it would take to turn me out 'spectable. I was trying hard to get 'spectable, but it wouldn't come all of a sudden, for fares are dreadful contrary, and my pals weren't good uns, and rum was more tempting that winter than ever I remember. But I gave it up at last—chucked rum clean overboard—took a pride in the next cab and horse old Bones found for me, and was reg'lar with my washing and shaving till they hardly knew me on the ranks, I was so orful clean. I was partikler over my pussonal appearance, they said—and I had to stand a lot of chaff from Bill Chumps and his sing-song lot—but I improved. I could feel myself improving all over—out'ardly and innardly.

It was hard lines waiting—but I have said before, I wasn't in a nurry, and I didn't get puffect in the lump, but backslided a little once or twice. I had quite made up my mind to see Mary Daykin again, and in a brand new character too. One afternoon,

about tea-time, I took an old party from the Bank to Camberwell Green—he was a very old party, and very weak, for two of his clerks carried him into the cab like a Guy Fox. In the Grove, Camberwell, I set him down, and he took my arm to the door.

“Thank you,” he said, “there’s your fare, my man.”

He gave me three shillings and sixpence.

“This is eighteenpence too much, sir,” I said.

The old gentleman leaned against his own doorpost for support, and struggled for some time to get breath.

“Bless my soul and body !” he exclaimed.

“Just eighteenpence,” I said.

“Good Lud ! Have you been long at your business?”

“Twelve years, sir.”

“I have been fifty at mine, and I have had a cab from the City all those years, and I have never been told that I paid too much before.”

He took back his eighteenpence. I had not expected that quite, but it was on my conscience to tell him. I had improved so.

"You're a fine fellow," he said, "you're a credit to cabmen. You can call for me every afternoon, if you like. You're a fine fellow, sir."

I drove away, as proud as a peacock. At the end of the Grove I thought that as I was a fine fellow and a credit to cabmen, it was time I looked up Mary Daykin, and I went off in search of her at once, in the full flash of my poppylarity. I had a trouble to find that terris again—I lost myself three times in the new streets, but there were people to ask questions of, and it was not long afore I was at the 'dential house where the perliceman and I and Mary went up the steps in the morning after Boxing Day.

It was eggstrornary how my heart beat under my badge as I walked up those steps. Was I getting fat and puffy? Wasn't I well?

It wasn't likely I could be bashful at my age. Cabmen can't be bashful—it ain't nateral. Yet I *was* bashful when she, Mary, opened the door, prettier and trimmer than ever—stared for a moment with her big eyes full of wonder—and then broke into a merry laugh and clapped her hands.

"Why, I declare if it isn't Mr. Pledge."

"Yes, that's him," I answered; "I'm the bad 'un!"

"Come in, please. I won't keep you long. I'll just run upstairs and get——"

"Not the money," I exclaimed, in a more woolly voice than ever; "don't say anythink about the money. I ain't come for that."

"What have you come for, then?" she asked.

"Jest to see you—jest to see if you're well."

"Oh! I'm very well, thank you," she said, laughing.



"That's good hearing. And do you like your place?"

"Yes. Mrs. Botherton's very kind to me."

"And that's good hearing, too. I think I'll go now."

I turned to go. It had struck me sudden that I hadn't anything to stop for, or to say.

"But you haven't told me how you are, Mr. Pledge."

"Oh! I'm allers well."

"You caught a bad cold that night. You're husky now."

"It's the fog on my chest."

"Why, it isn't foggy."

"It's comin' up thick," I stammered; "all down the Peckham Road, like soup. It'll be here presently."

"Is it though? and—oh! here's my mistress!"

Mrs. Botherton came out of her little parlour, and looked from one to the other.

"I haven't ordered a cab," said she.

"No, ma'am;—but——"

"And you aren't going out in a cab, surely?"

"I'm not going out at all, ma'am."

"I thought your young man was coming for you at six?"

"If you please, ma'am, he's not my young man; and I wasn't going out with him; and I told him this morning I would never, never keep company with him."

"Who's she talking about," I asked.

"Mr. Riggs—the—the policeman."

"Wot, *the* perliceman—the fellow who—"

"Yes, that's the man," said Mary; "he's been calling ever since. He wanted me to go to the theatre to-night, as he's off duty, and got an order."

"He's a very respectable young man—I knew his father—he was a milkman, and had two cows on the Rye," said Mrs Botherton.

"If you're going to the play with the bobby, I'll drive you there for nothin'," I said, hoarser than ever; "not that I respex

him—not that I shouldn't die happy if I was to run over him ; but I'll do it, if you're going."

"I'm not going."

"Don't you like him?"

"I can't bear him ; but he's been here calling ever so many times since that night, on one excuse or another ; and I can't abide him."

"I'm precious glad. Good evening."

I could not say any more that night—I went away happy but muddled, from my pretty Mary, and that wicked old match-maker, her missus. I called again though—without my cab—and at last took Mary to the theatre myself, all by myself, and in a new suit that made a tremendous swell of me. I wrote to her first, and she sent word back she'd come, and a happy evening we spent together in the pit.

Going home that night—I drove her home in a hansom—I told her through the trap in the roof that I wasn't a bad 'un any

longer, and that it was her own blessed self which had made a different man of me, and she cried a little, and said she didn't doubt it, and that she had never doubted me. I made her an offer through that trap—reg'larly proposed—and was accepted!

And so we kept company together when we could, and Mrs. Botherton allowed me to visit once a week, and see Mary, and I saved up, and Mary saved up, and Bones is going to let me have a cab of my own next week for fourteen pound paid down, and the rest in monthly hinstalments till it's squared, and Mary next week will be my partikler Mrs. Pledge.

There, that's the long and short of it, sir, and your quite welcome to put it all into print tidying up the langerwidge here and there. It was a Call, wasn't it now? And it was all through my dear Mary, Heaven bless her!

1

2

3

**THE BARMAID OF BATTLETON.**




## THE BARMAID OF BATTLETON.

## CHAPTER I.

## “YOUNG TODD”

NOT that Miss Daly was the only barmaid in attendance behind the counter of the big refreshment room at Battleton Junction, but that she was a barmaid with a difference—and a remarkable difference—from her six contemporaries employed by Messrs. Javelins and Freshwater, the eminent contractors, to attend to the wants and wishes of a passing crowd, clamouring for soup, sausage rolls, buns, and bitter ale, to the frightful accompaniment of






railway bells and whistles, and stentorian commands to "change here for everywhere." That her personal appearance was attractive was her good fortune or her misfortune, and was certainly not her fault; she would scarcely have been placed at Battleton Junction had she been old, ugly, or "squat;" she was a tall, good-looking girl, with brown eyes and brown hair, and she attended to her duties with a grave self-possession that was remarkable in the Battleton Junction girls, who were demonstratively fussy or coldly indifferent, according to the class of customer who presented himself to their merciful consideration.

It may be said at once that the Junction girls—as they were generally termed in the ancient town of Battleton—did not think much of Miss Daly, did not make great friends with Miss Daly, did not take her into their little confidences, or ask her to join them in their little strolls after the bar was closed for the night, or when hours

“off duty” allowed of country rambles in various directions and under various and sometimes striking circumstances. Miss Daly was “stuck up,” Miss Dart said, but then Miss Daly had declined to see the shops in Battleton with her, after one evening’s experience, during which Miss Dart had giggled spasmodically all the way up High Street, and looked after every well-dressed man under fifty between the station and the Corn Market, exchanging “good evenings” and “how d’ye do’s” with a fair ten per cent. of the number. Miss Daly was “sly,” Miss Brand thought, but Miss Brand was a plain-spoken girl who let them—*i.e.*, the customers—“have it” if they bothered her too much—or rather, at times, did not let them have it, but looked over their heads with a stony glare, and allowed them to scream for drink in vain. Miss Daly was “spoons” on Young Todd, and ought to be ashamed of herself to lead him on like that, Miss Racket remarked, but then Miss



Racket had been "spoons" on Young Todd herself, had launched herself at Todd, in fact, had neglected good customers—brandy-and-water customers—for Todd, and been taken out once for a quiet drive by Todd, in the happy halcyon days before Miss Daly came amongst them like a blight.

Miss Daly looked hardly like a blight behind the refreshment counter; she was always very pale and pretty in her black dress, and generally very staid unless something out of the common—Young Todd was out of the common—brightened her features with a smile.

It may be a matter for speculation as to the "spoons" on Miss Daly's part, but there need be no mystery as to the feelings of Young Todd. He made no mystery of them himself; he was even proud of them; his feelings had been engaged some twenty times before, and in nineteen cases by the fair Hebes whom Messrs. Javelins and Freshwater had set in authority at Battleton

Junction, but in no instance had Young Todd been so deeply and terribly impressed as in this particular affair, which was now absorbing, consuming, and softening him to an unparalleled degree; which was giving him a taste for whisky-and-water and a distaste for his family and family surroundings; which was exciting at last the curiosity and anxiety of the family itself, that had been a slumberous, apathetic, do-as-you-like kind of a family for years and years before Miss Daly's time.

The Todd family were big folk in Battleton, and not to be despised out of Battleton, take them altogether. There were not many of them; they consisted of Mrs. Todd, the relict of Bartholomew Todd, who had made much money by wholesale gums and india-rubbers down a dirty slum in Mincing Lane, and half of whose property was settled for life on his widow, with reversion to an only son, the Young Todd of our simple narrative; three Misses Todd, all

one pattern, cut crosswise and with many angles, with strong biases towards High Church and High Church curates, and whose money was strictly settled on themselves; and Young Todd, whose money had settled itself strictly on him too up to the present period of our story, for no one save himself and the barmaids had seen the colour of it, envious people said.

Why he was called Young Todd it was hard to declare; when there was an Old Todd flying away to town by express every morning, it might have been appropriate, but when Old Todd had flown away to a better world than Mincing Lane, Young Todd became somewhat of a misnomer, especially as Young Todd had reached eight-and-twenty summers, clear. Certainly he looked young—he was a very slim man, without a hair or an expression on his face, and he wore turn-down collars, a short blue jacket, and a polo-cap. There were three things which he had loved before

Miss Daly came to Battleton—his pipe, his bull-terrier pup, and himself, but she had changed all this as with the touch of the wand of an enchantress. She had called the bull-terrier “that nasty dog,” and it had been consigned to its kennel from that hour ; she had hated the sight of men with short pipes in their mouths before dinner, he had heard her say once, and he had taken to cigars and to smoking them after eight p.m. ; and as for himself, there were fits of despondency upon him at times when he thought he should rather like to shoot himself than otherwise. Still the time had not come yet, and Young Todd lived at the refreshment counter of Battleton Junction, and drank whisky-and-water as long as Miss Daly would serve him with the article. When the trains came in—and they were always coming in at interesting crises of his career—he would retire to the back, and stand on the forms so that he might watch Miss Daly over the heads of the

travellers, and make sure that nobody had fallen in love with her, and was intentionally lingering over his pork-pie or sandwich, and when the trains went out he resumed his place, put one elbow on the counter, and talked and gazed—generally gazed, as his powers of conversation were limited, and Miss Daly did not care for the subjects on which he was disposed to grow eloquent, billiards and bull-terriers.

So regular a loungee at the counter, so good a customer, so well known an inhabitant of Battleton, was obliged to be received with a fair amount of courtesy, and he was received in quite a sisterly—possibly more than sisterly—manner by all but Miss Daly. Miss Daly said “good morning” and “good evening”—especially “good evening”—very graciously to him, but she did not imitate the style of the rest of the young ladies, or put herself out in any way for Mr. Todd. Conscious of the power she wielded over his susceptible

breast, she did not hasten to meet his requirements at the bar, did not lean over the counter and talk to him between the sandwich stands and the dishes of buns, did not regard him languishingly whilst an irate passenger was hammering away with the milled edge of a shilling to attract her attention, did not whisper, or laugh, or slap him in a kittenish impulse, and betrayed not even a jealous symptom when he talked to Miss Dart, or Miss Racket, or anybody else.

"I can't make her out," he soliloquised in the quietude of his bed-room three months after Miss Daly had been in Battleton, and after she had said "No, thank you," to half-a-dozen pairs of Courvoisier's gloves, of which he had begged her acceptance; "she isn't like anybody else I ever knew at the Junction. Polly Racket would make six of her for fun, but she's an awfully nice girl, somehow. She isn't silly, either, or she'd fancy I was



going to ask her to marry: she's a sharp, clever little woman, 'pon my soul, but I can't make her out. And that's deuced odd, too, seeing what a lot of girls have been always running after me."

It was not odd, but Young Todd was beyond the discovery of the solution to the mystery; his self-complaisance stood in the way, and the girls who ran after him were of the ordinary class of high-steppers, whose mission in life was to be always running after somebody. Even in his own sphere, and where the exact amount of his income and his expectations were known, Young Todd was sought and flattered by some of "the sleek and shining creatures of the chase," but Young Todd never proposed, and had been always happier and more at his ease at the station-buffet, or in the streets when the shop-girls were going home. Happier, till Miss Daly appeared—then it was all over with him and his nonchalant airs and grins and grimaces. He strolled in and out no

more in his old patronising way ; he came in early and stopped as a rule all day ; he was the slave of the refreshment counter, the ghost of his former self, the talk of the little town where everybody talked.

His mother condescended to ask a few questions of him at last, and to tell him what the world was saying ; he laughed at her questions as irrelevant, and the shocking expression he used as regarded the world needs no repetition in these virtuous pages. His sisters satirised him and his tastes, and he "gave it them hot," as he afterwards expressed himself to a friend, for meddling with his affairs, and what didn't concern them. He never interfered between them, and *their* larks with the curates, did he ? Let him alone, and he'd let them alone ; nobody need be afraid he was going to make a fool of himself, or throw himself away ; he knew what he was about, well enough. Trust him !

But nobody trusted him any more for this

declaration, and the home of the Todds became shadowland, in the midst of which much suspicion and uncharity and conspiracy were brooding. They affected to let him alone, and he let them alone according to his usual way—which was very much alone indeed—but they wrote long letters and urgent letters to Uncle John, the mainstay of the family, trustee, executor, man of the world, and man of war in the Indian service, and they begged very earnestly for Uncle John to take the matter up, as the whole affair was becoming very serious indeed. They had no influence over Edwin—Young Todd was Edwin—he was his own master, and they were desperately afraid of what would come of it. They had been afraid also to tell Uncle John before; they did not like intruding upon his studies, his new work on “Fortifications and Fireworks,” his new charge, red-hot and slashing, against the Secretary of State for War, on the iron-plated stocking question ;

they knew how hard he had been upon his nephew and godson in many matters; but, as he was the only being whom Edwin regarded with any degree of awe, they trusted he would come to the rescue, and "put a stop to it all" before the family was disgraced for ever and ever by a *mésalliance*, or by some dreadful scandal that would be almost as bad, if not quite as lasting.

"I'll soon put an end to this nonsense," said Major Crawshaw, after reading his sister's letter. "I'll have no more of it. Barmaid, indeed!" He had put an end to a great deal of nonsense in his time, being a hard-headed, sharp old soldier in his way, and he was very sure of his power in demolishing this soap-bubble affair in less than four-and-twenty hours. He knew the world and what it was made of—he understood men and women, particularly foolish men and designing women, whom he had come across in the course of an experience of five-and-forty years, to whom

he had taught wisdom and given warning before this—ah! many times before, for other people's sake and his own. Let him march and away against the enemy at once.

## CHAPTER II.

## MAJOR CRAWSHAW BLUNDERS TO BEGIN WITH.

THE last train from town had reached Battleton Junction at 9.30 p.m., and the station girls were extra busy in consequence, when a tall, stern, bronzed-faced man, with closely-cropped grey hair and an iron grey moustache, strode up to the counter, and demanded a glass of stout. Major Crawshaw had chosen his time well, for Young Todd was not present on the occasion—the Todds dining late on that particular evening, by some kitchen mischance which had been carefully prepared beforehand by more than one conspirator.

Major Crawshaw had marched at once to that portion of the counter over which Miss Racket presided. From a hasty glance over the heads of a struggling mob his keen eyes had taken stock of Miss Racket,—her tall, full figure, her round, rosy cheeks and broad, continual smile; and he had decided that this was the particular vixen who had upset the mental equilibrium of his family, and fascinated his fool of a nephew. Just the sort of young woman to wind poor little Todd round her finger, he thought—pert, showy, saucy, and far from unreserved in her demeanour. This was she without a doubt.

Miss Racket drew him his glass of stout leisurely and indifferently, and after five stentorian applications for the beverage. She was in no hurry, if he were, and there was a young man to attend to who was going north, with a white hat all on one side, and who had complimented her on her appearance that evening, and regretted

that he did not live at Battleton, and would have heaped other compliments had time allowed him, and Major Crawshaw had not bawled persistently for stout over his left shoulder.

The Major drank slowly, and ate a ham sandwich meanwhile, which he forgot to pay for, until another of the young ladies reminded him of his error. This was Miss Daly, always as sharp as a needle in her employer's interest; not Miss Racket, who, when flurried by admirers, would have allowed a quarter of a hundred of Watling's pies to escape her notice with impunity.

When the railway bell had rung, and the white hat had drifted away with other travelling atoms, and there was peace, and only one man left at the bar, Major Crawshaw began to attract the attention of Miss Racket. He was not going on by the 9.35; he was a resident at Battleton, or a visitor, or—for such odd things do occur at refreshment counters!—he had been struck



by her personal appearance, and disposed to proceed by the next down train. Miss Racket was impulsive and romantic, and leaped quickly to conclusions—but then the Major stared at her very much, did not even take his eyes off her when drinking his stout, but glared at her with the rim of his glass pressed against the bridge of his aquiline nose. Miss Racket glanced at him again. By the side of the effusive young man in the white hat he had appeared grim and old enough, but alone in his glory he was a trim, good-looking, stalwart gentleman of imposing appearance. Miss Bland called him “an old buck,” and asked Miss Racket behind the soda-water bottles who was the old buck that was “making eyes” at her, but Miss Racket did not answer her rude question, and thought within herself that he was only a middle-aged buck, and middle-aged bucks are deserving of a little consideration when they are struck “all of a heap” at first sight. There were many

tales, true or false, in barmaid history of lucky "catches" in this fashion; perhaps her time had come, and this stern gentleman was her "fate." She wished she had not let him ask so many times for stout now, and that he would not glare quite so fiercely at her; perhaps there was a "black" somewhere on her nose. The "blacks" came in very frequently through the open doors of the refreshment department. She had been unconsciously smudged for ten minutes yesterday, having been all that time without looking into the glass at the back of the counter.

Yes, she had made a conquest.

"It's a fine evening," said the Major.

"Yes, sir, very fine."

"You'll soon have finished here, I suppose."

"Some of us will and some of us won't. I'm one of the 'won't's' this evening," she said, facetiously.

"You'll excuse me, young lady," he said,

punctiliously, "but I do not quite understand you. What is a 'won't?'"

"'Won't go home till morning'—almost," she said, lightly. "Why, how dull you are!"

"Yes, I am dull. I always was dull of comprehension, I am afraid," he replied. "You mean as trade falls off, a less number of young ladies is required at the bar?"

"Oh, yes, she means all that, sir," Miss Bland broke in here, to Miss Racket's suppressed annoyance, and then Miss Bland and Miss Dart had an animated conversation together, interspersed with hysterical laughter, and much "Did he though?" and "Really!"

"You young ladies appear to be very happy here," said the Major, still to Miss Racket.

"We *are* very happy—at times."

"Plenty of admirers, of course?"

"Lots of them—such as they are," said Miss Racket.

"Ah! they vary in quality as well as quantity, I suppose?"

"I should think they did," replied Miss Racket; whilst the outspoken Miss Bland muttered "Rather!" and nearly killed Miss Dart with laughter.

"I suppose you get used to them all; and don't pay any heed to their *persiflage*," said the Major.

"Their pursy what?" inquired the bewildered Miss Racket.

"Their light compliments and their foolish love-making,—their silly and maudlin sentimentalities, half drink and half damned nonsense—I beg pardon," he said, gravely raising his hat; "I am addressing a lady—and didn't mean to be so forcible."

"We don't believe everything we are told," said Miss Racket; "oh! no."

"In your position, young lady," he said, "you should not believe anything you are told—unless it's in disparagement of the sandwiches; and they *are* confoundedly

bad, to be sure. I never before came across so much fat in one sandwich in the whole course of my existence."

"I'm very sorry."

"Pray don't mention it. I did not call here for sandwiches, but to talk quietly and naturally to a sensible young woman," said the Major.

"Oh! sir, how can you say so. Oh! dear me!"

"I came to Battleton on purpose, I assure you."

"Why I never saw you in my life."

"No, I don't think you did," said the Major. "Perhaps you'll wish you never had seen me, or be very glad one day that we have met in this fashion. There's no telling. Life's a queer enigma. I'll take one more glass of stout."

"Yes, sir."

The stout was drawn, and the Major continued his fixed stare. "Your name is Daly, I presume?" he said at last.

"Oh! no, it ain't," said Miss Racket, very quickly now.

"Not Miss Daly?—indeed," and the Major's face shadowed as with a keen sense of disappointment.

Miss Racket suddenly became pert and sharp and satirical.

"I'm not the beauty; oh! no. I wonder where your eyes were if you came all this way to look at her. Oh, no—lor bless you, we're none of us half as good-looking as Miss Daly. Three pence, please, for that stout; and thank you."

Miss Racket would have retired immediately, had he not said quickly, "Wait one moment, please," in so authoritative a tone that he reminded her instinctively of Mr. Javelins on his inspection tour, and when the receipts did not quite correspond with the consumption of material.

Major Crawshaw looked round the bar very carefully now, and for the first time observed a quiet, thoughtful girl standing

at the back of the bar, reading a letter.

"Is—is that Miss Daly?" he inquired.

"Yes, that's *her*," answered Miss Racket ;  
"shall I tell her you want to speak  
to her?"

"Not this moment, if you please,"  
replied the Major. "I'm very sorry you are  
not Miss Daly—it's exceedingly aggravating  
to lose my time like this. Besides, it  
wouldn't have mattered so much if you  
had been—dash it!" and Major Crawshaw  
stamped with his foot and looked vexed.

Miss Racket by this time had recovered  
herself, and lost the little amiability which  
she had been ever known to possess. She  
did not love Miss Daly as a sister—on the  
contrary, as she had told Miss Bland more  
than once in confidence, she hated her  
like poison; and to be gravely informed  
by a gentleman that he had lost time in  
talking to her, under the misapprehension  
that she was the identical Miss Daly whom  
he had come especially to see, would have

tried the temper of a greater saint than she was likely to turn out.

"Miss Daly," she said with almost a screech of envy; "here's another gentleman wants to talk to you for a little while."

Miss Daly looked up from her letter, and then went on calmly with its perusal.

"Oh! it's true—it is, indeed," said Miss Racket; "ask him."

"I am busy," said Miss Daly, without looking up this time.

"Miss Daly—if you will excuse my abruptness—I should be glad of your attention for a few moments," said the Major.

There was a genuine ring in the voice that was not a little startling to the Battleton Junction girls, and it impressed Miss Daly, who put her letter in her pocket, and advanced at once. When she was facing him, and regarding him with two thoughtful brown eyes, he was more sorry




than ever that this was Miss Daly—he hardly knew why at the moment, there seemed too many reasons to be sorry, and they were all jumbled together at that instant inextricably.

“Well, sir?” said Miss Daly, very quietly.

## CHAPTER III.

## WHILST THE IRON WAS HOT !

MAJOR CRAWSHAW was not in "good form" that particular evening. He had been wanting in perspicuity; he had blundered egregiously, and now, facing the enemy whose machinations he had come to Battleton expressly to circumvent, he felt himself still more at a loss. He did not know what to say on the spur of the moment; the real Miss Daly was not at all the Miss Daly whom he had expected to find, but a calm, self-possessed young lady, whom service behind a refreshment bar had not spoiled or rendered "flashy." This quiet



being might have been taken for a lady anywhere—might have held her place in any society, he thought, if she had had the discretion to hold her tongue. For, of course, she would be as sharp and jerky as Miss Racket when she began to discourse;—all barmaids' conversation being essentially jerky, keeping time with the money as it rattled into the till. No; he was mistaken again; Miss Daly's voice had not an atom's worth of jerkiness in it.

"Your name is Daly," the Major said, for the want of a better question to start with.

"Yes, sir. What do you require of me?"

"I should be glad of a little private conversation, Miss Daly," he said. "At what time do you leave this bar?"

Miss Daly looked somewhat astonished, and even doubtful of his motive for addressing her. A scarlet flush flickered on her cheeks, although the brown eyes remain-

ed steady and inquiring. She did not actually doubt the man yet, notwithstanding that there had been all kinds of strange beasts prowling about her path since her novitiate; the eyes which encountered hers were clear and sharp grey eyes that were difficult to associate with any guile. For the present, at least, and despite the singularity of his question, she could afford her interlocutor the benefit of the doubt.

“Have you any particular reason for asking me?” she said.

“I have.”

“What is it?”

“I wish to speak to you on business of importance!”

“I do not believe in any business of importance between you and me,” said Miss Daly, coldly, “unless,” she added, quickly, “unless you have heard from my uncle—have been sent to tell me all the news.”

“I have not the honour of knowing any member of your family, Miss Daly,” said

the Major, "and the business of importance to which I alluded affects my family rather than your own."

"I can have nothing to do with it."

"Unfortunately you have."

"If you will kindly explain?"

"Not here," said the old soldier, very sternly, "certainly not at this counter, and with these young women listening to us."

"You have my full permission to speak out, sir."

"Where do you live when away from this——place?"

"I do not feel called upon to tell you," was the grave reply.

"And you will not tell me, possibly?"

"No, sir, I will not."

"Confound it," he blurted forth; "what are you afraid of?"

"I am not afraid of you, certainly," said Miss Daly, very calmly. "I hardly doubt you—but I am not disposed to put my trust in you."

"It must surely strike you that there are topics of conversation which might be discussed in a more fitting place than this?" he said.

"I am not afraid of any topic," was the reply, "and you, as a stranger, have no right to make a mystery about it."

"You distrust me?"

"I distrust anyone who is not straightforward," replied Miss Daly.

"Very well—very well," said the Major, turning very red, "this is the first time in my life I have been told I was not straightforward. I—I can't mention the nature of my business without rendering you an object of ridicule to the rest of the young ladies present. They are listening now, for that matter. Look at them."

Miss Daly laughed pleasantly and momentarily at this.

"Ah! yes—they listen a little; and," with a sigh, "they don't like me much. I am not one of them quite."

"I hope you'll never be such a young fool as to try to imitate *their* ways," said the Major.

"Oh! they are not as they seem," said Miss Daly; "they are very good and kind sometimes—they are honest, and hard-working, and they take care of themselves bravely, considering what defenceless women most of them are."

"Bravo, Miss Daly," said the Major; "let me shake hands with you for sticking up for your class."

Miss Daly did not accept the invitation; she was indignant now, and disposed to turn from him.

"By Jove! you're a brave little woman," he continued; "and it was beastly unfair of me to sneer in that fashion at you. Not that I meant to sneer exactly—I intended to advise you, as your own father might do—and I'm old enough to be your father, my child, remember that—and—*hollo*, you sir! What the devil brings *you* down here?"

"Good Gad! uncle, is that you?" and Young Todd came to a full stop, and remained with his mouth open and his small eyes distended, as at an apparition which had suddenly confronted him.

"Yes, it is I," said his uncle.

"Do they know you are coming, up at the house?" asked Mr. Todd.

"I thought I would give them an agreeable surprise," was the uncle's evasive answer; "it's a year and a half since I was at Battleton last."

"So long as that?" said the uncomplimentary nephew. "I shouldn't have thought it. Will you—will you take anything?" he stammered forth.

Major Crawshaw glanced from his nephew to Miss Daly; the nephew was staring hard at the lady; the lady was looking down demurely at the marble counter.

Too innocent, thought the Major; a deuced sight too innocent to be natural. Like Miss Brand, he put the lady down as



“sly”—very sly, and a woman of whom to be wary from that time forth. If she had blushed and giggled and leered, as Miss Racket would have done, he would not have been afraid of Miss Daly; but the semblance of utter unconsciousness was an artful proceeding that proved at once the difficult nature of the task which he had set himself. He must be very wary in this business.

He replied to his nephew's offer, “No, thank you—nothing more till we get home;” and he linked his arm in that of Edwin's forthwith.

“I—I didn't think of going to the house just at present,” stammered Young Todd; “I have only just left it.”

“It's so long a time since I have been this way that I am very likely to miss it without your guidance,” said the Major.

“Yes—but——”

“And surely there is nothing here that is worth wasting time over,” he added, sar-

castically ; " the refreshments are bad ; and the barmaids we can leave to the passengers, porters, and shopmen."

" Ah !—yes—exactly. Shall I call this fly ? then you can take your luggage as well, and I can——"

" No, we will walk, Edwin. The luggage is booked to follow me. What a time it is since we have had a long chat together !"

But Young Todd was not to be led away wholly without an effort ; he had had time to reflect on the position.

" One moment, uncle," he said, disengaging his arm ; " I always have a little nip of whisky-and-water after dinner. I'll not keep you a moment."

" A nip of whisky-and-water after dinner is an extremely bad habit ; but don't be long," the Major replied.

He stood at a little distance from the counter and watched his nephew approach Miss Daly and give the order required. Already the truth was very patent to him that

there was an understanding of some kind between Edwin Todd and Miss Daly, and that they were neither inclined to trust him in the matter. Already they both suspected him, and guessed the object of his coming—it would be necessary to strike whilst the iron was hot. He was a man of action, quick and prompt ; when he thought a thing, or said a thing, he carried it out at once—there had been no shilly-shallying at any period of his existence. “That able and indefatigable officer” he had been once styled in a despatch to head-quarters, and it had brought him promotion, and made him a proud man. Able and indefatigable he was—who knew that better than he—and he was not going to be baffled at the outset by a pig-headed boy and a chit of a girl. Not he ; he was too old a soldier, and too used to campaigning.

Young Todd was sipping at his whisky, and muttering something with closed teeth to Miss Daly between whiles—making fresh

arrangements possibly—when the Major said, sharply,

“Come, Edwin—we can’t hang about here all night.”

“All right,” said Edwin, evidently in some fear of his uncle at present; “I am ready.”

A few more words from him to Miss Daly, the same innocent expression on Miss Daly’s face, and then Major Crawshaw and his nephew were on the high-road together.

The Major began at once—the iron was quite hot enough, he thought.

“I question the policy of these refreshment bars at railway stations,” he said, “and a lot of bold-faced women behind them ready to flirt with any cad who turns up.”

“People must have refreshment, I suppose,” Young Todd remarked.

“I would limit the refreshments consumed to *bonâ fide* travellers. I would not allow half the town sneaking in and out at

all hours after these girls, if I had any authority here. By Jove, I'd alter the whole business," said the Major.

"I don't think half the town goes there. I don't know," said Edwin Todd, mildly. He was a mild young man of outward aspect, and very difficult to argue with. He had an unpleasant habit of agreeing upon any point for the sake of peace and quietness, and keeping his own opinion to himself, and this was always the difficulty with Young Todd.

"*You go there,*" said the Major, suddenly, "for one."

"Yes—but I'm not half the town exactly, and——"

"And you're always there, Edwin—you know you are."

"Who told you so? Mother?" asked his nephew, "or my sisters?"

"I don't mince matters. Your mother wrote to say she was unhappy about you—that she was afraid you had formed an

attachment to one of these young women, and that I had better run down and see what mischief was done, and what mischief could be prevented, and here I am. There."

It was no wonder that Major Crawshaw's feelings were hurt when Miss Daly had hinted that he was far from straightforward—there was no beating about the bush in this instance. He had told his nephew very plainly what was the object of his visit, and within a quarter of an hour of his meeting with him, too. That was brisk and frank and soldier-like, at any rate.

Young Todd smiled in a galvanic kind of fashion, and shifted his stick from his right hand to his left.

"There's no mischief done, uncle—and there's no mischief to prevent," he said at last.

"That's well. I'm glad of it."

"The women folk are foolish and nervous about it, and——"

"About what?" asked the Major, interrupting him.

"About my going to the station and having a little chat now and then, as young fellows will, you know, with a pretty woman. I daresay you have done it yourself, in your day, uncle."

"Hundreds of times," was the ready answer, "but it was all fair sailing, sir, and no false sentiment or false principles behind it all. Do you understand me?"

"Yes—no—I think so."

"I wasn't fool enough to fall in love with any woman of that kind."

"I suppose not."

"Are you?"

"In love. Oh, no!" said Edwin Todd, with a feeble little laugh, "not exactly—that's not in my line."

"Although, if I had been in love, I should have been man enough to own it," continued the Major. "There's something

simple in it, but nothing disgraceful, if it's an honest affection."

"Precisely," said Todd; "just my opinion, uncle."

"But you're not in love?"

"Not I. Not a bit of that," said the vulgar young Todd, with a rather feeble laugh.

"You're too sensible a fellow, I hope?"

"I flatter myself I am."

"I'm very glad to hear it, Edwin, for your mother's sake as well as your own—but don't keep speaking with your teeth closed, it aggravates me," said the Major; "and now to the second and more important point. Are any of the girls at the Junction in love with you, do you think?"

Young Todd blushed and simpered, and even hazarded a wink at his uncle.

"I shouldn't like to say—really, one can't say exactly, you know," was his shy and hesitating answer.



"*I should say it was extremely unlikely,*" remarked the Major, after looking askance at his nephew, "but women are easily flattered into thinking a man is in love with them, and then their silly heads are turned in all directions but the right."

"That's their fault," was Young Todd's comment.

"And their misfortune always, poor women. Why, I consider that a man who feigns an affection he does not feel, and so misleads a girl out of her sphere to think of him, is an infernal scamp—a most infernal scamp, sir."

"Why—yes," said Young Todd, fairly alarmed at this sudden exhibition of fierceness, "so he is, unless——"

"I'd cut off such a vagabond with a shilling, were he my own son," interrupted the Major. "I'd kick him downstairs out of my house as I would a dog, I'd—what do you mean by 'unless'? Unless

what—why on earth don't you finish your sentences?"

"I was going—but you wouldn't let me finish," answered Edwin.

"Well—well," said the Major, impatiently, "*unless*——"

"Unless she encourages him, and leads him on—knows that he is not likely to marry her, and still prefers his company to other fellows. Don't you see?"

"I see a woman going fast to the devil, then," said the Major, "and I say God help her. That's all. But as for the man—he's either a fool or a knave, and I say God confound him, with all my heart. He doesn't deserve any sympathy—surely you don't think he does?"

"N—no—certainly not."

"But we will have a long talk over this presently, now that we have cleared the briars and brushwood away. There's been a little nonsense going on at the refresh-

ment bar, but I'm glad you tell me there's nothing serious between you and that Daly girl."

"Serious?" said Young Todd, with another unpleasant laugh, "of course not."

"Your mother will be glad to hear it."

"I have told her so a thousand times already," said Edwin Todd, and for the first time rather sulkily.

"Ah! but not as you have spoken to me, as one man can speak to another, face to face, and without a lie between them," said the Major.

"Yes, exactly," murmured the nephew, but he did not meet his uncle face to face then, but looked down upon the flinty pathway of the old town and set his teeth closer together than ever.

The Major was a man of tact, and did not "worry" the question. They walked on in silence after this; he had spoken out and paved the way to a complete understanding; he was disposed, being a truthful man,

to believe his nephew, if not wholly and implicitly, and to think that the women-folk had made the usual mountain out of the customary mole-hill. So far so good—it was a very fair beginning, considering that this was the first hour of his arrival—and now here they were before the great country house of the Todds, lying a little apart, on a hill side, from the town of Battleton.

The Major let go his nephew's arm, strode forwards, pushed open the great swing gate, and entered first.

"You'll find them all within, uncle," said Edwin, "I shall not be long."

"But——"

"I shall be back in a few minutes—I have forgotten something for to-morrow—in the town—you know," and Young Todd was off like a lapwing.

"Yes, you have forgotten something, Edwin, and that is that I'm not to be humbugged," muttered the angry Major, as he

stood in the dark carriage way, looking after the rapidly receding form of his nephew.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE MAJOR SETTLES IT SATISFACTORILY.

RUTH DALY, prayer-book in hand, and looking very unbarmalike, was coming quietly home from church the following day, when across the last meadow between the church and town she encountered Major Crawshaw. She recognized very quickly the tall, inquisitive gentleman of the preceding evening, and would have passed him had he not stood direct in her way in the little footpath that ran across the fields there.

“Good morning, Miss Daly,” he said, raising his hat.

Miss Daly bowed slightly, but did not respond to his salutation.

"I thought you would come this way," he continued. "I have been looking for you."

"Indeed?"

"They told me at your lodgings that you had gone to church, so I came to meet you."

"They had no right to tell you where I had gone, and you had no right to ask, sir," said Miss Daly, drawing herself up very proudly now.

"Pardon me, but I had a right."

"To persecute me because I serve at Battleton Junction. Ah, well, you are not the first gentleman who has thought that," she said, satirically.

"I have not persecuted you, young lady," said Major Crawshaw, very gravely, "and I have no intention of doing so."

"Then, good morning."

"But I have an intention of speaking to

you about my nephew—I have come to London expressly for that.”

“You had better speak to your nephew himself.”

“I have done so, as you,” he added, with emphasis, “are perfectly aware.”

Miss Daly coloured slightly.

“Yes, I am aware of that,” she confessed.

“He told you last night after he had given me the slip in a most ungentlemanly fashion. Did he not?”

“He told me that you were his uncle, Major Crawshaw, and that he was very much afraid of you. But I am not, sir,” she added, looking up at him fearlessly, “and I will trouble you to let me pass to my home.”

The Major half drew aside to allow her to pass, and then altered his mind, and blocked the way again.

“No; I can’t be put down in this fashion,” he said, firmly. “I must speak,



and I will speak, and if you are not afraid of me you will listen. My persecution will not last many minutes."

"Very well, come to the bar to-morrow, and leave me in peace to-day."

"Leave you in peace!" said the Major, indignantly. "I have had enough of this nonsense between the two of you. You know my nephew is waiting for you well enough."

"No, I don't," said Miss Daly, quickly ; "where is he?"

"Outside your own door—hanging about like a thief."

"He told me he would never do that again."

"He would tell you anything, my child—he's an abominable liar," said the Major.

"Yes ; he is not very truthful," said Ruth Daly, thoughtfully.

"You had better listen to an old man like me," the Major remarked, "though he may tell you some plain truths, than to a

weak fellow like him. It might do you more good, Miss Daly, after all."

Ruth Daly looked at the uncle's earnest face attentively, and her manner changed for the better, and became more natural.

"Perhaps it would. Come along, then," she said.

She turned from the direction she had been pursuing, and the Major said:

"This way?"

"Yes—away from him, please," she added, with a little shudder.

"You don't like my nephew?"

"I can't bear him."

"Honour bright?"

"Upon my honour, I can't," she said.

"Then I have nothing to trouble you about, Miss Daly," said the Major. "I can say good morning at once, that is if I can believe you—and it's very odd, somehow, but I can. It is all *his* fault, then?"

He spoke as if he had made a full

explanation of the position, and she did not affect to misunderstand him.

“Yes—it is all his fault,” was the reply. “If he would only keep away—if he would not be so very, very foolish, and not make me look so very foolish, too,—if he would talk to Miss Dart, or Miss Racket—no, he had better not, perhaps, for he is weak, and neither of them would make him a good wife——”

“Good wife—good God!” said the Major.

“But if he would keep away for awhile amongst his own people, or if you would take him away to India, sir, he would soon be, oh! so much the better for it.”

“And you would be glad to see the last of him?”

“Yes, very glad—poor fellow!”

“I don’t like that ‘poor fellow!’” said the Major, doubtfully again; “‘pity is akin to love,’ the proverb says.”

“Oh! I could never love him, with all his property at his back, and all his fine

mother and sisters to love me even in return," cried Ruth Daly; "he is a poor weak, whisky-drinking boy, who wants a good uncle to look after him."

"Are you laughing at me, Miss Daly?"

"No, I am very serious," she replied, "but this Edwin Todd has been left to run wild too much, and so has grown wild. He has wanted his own way at home, and had it. There has been no one to care for him, and he is careless in consequence."

"All his own fault."

"Yours; for you are the guardian of him, and he respects and fears you."

"You are an extraordinary young woman," exclaimed the Major; "you should have been in a better position than at that beastly refreshment counter. By Jove! here am I receiving advice, instead of giving it."

"I am very rude, I fear."

"Not at all; don't mention it," he replied.

"I like rudeness of this kind—it does

one good. You're straightforward, if I'm not."

"Ah! I remember. I said last night you were not straightforward, and you were offended."

"Yes—because—but never mind that. Now tell me, Miss Daly, has my nephew asked you to marry him?"

"Once to marry him—several times to run away with him."

"And you have refused him the 'several times'?"

"Yes."

"And the 'once to marry him'—when was that?"

"Last night."

"I thought so; and you said No?"

"Yes. I can't bear him—I could hate him almost—haven't I said so?—if he wasn't such a fool and a child!" she added, passionately; "there, take him away, sir; take him away, and do your duty for once."

"Upon my word, Miss Daly, I was never talked to in this way before. I have been all my life doing my duty."

"You have failed here, I think," she murmured.

"And have you done your duty, Miss Daly? Let me ask you that in all kindness, and as a man of my age may do to a young lady out in the world and exposed to temptation?"

"I have tried. We can all but try," she answered; "I hope I have not wholly failed."

"To have been asked 'several times' to run away with my nephew implies a patient listener. I wish you had not said 'several times,' but only once; and then a sound slap to his leathern chaps, and a gallon of that bad stout thrown over him."

"Yes, it might have been wise," was the quiet response; "but one has to bear a great deal, and take everything as a jest,

behind the bar, or else the proprietors say we are disobliging and bad-tempered, and ruining the trade. And perhaps it *was* a jest—for him! It is difficult to take in earnest everything he says."

"He's a fool, Miss Daly," said the excited Major; "a perfect fool!"

"I am afraid he's not particularly clever."

"Perhaps," he added, "if I did look after him a little more, it would not be lost time on my part."

"I don't think it would. He is naturally a good-tempered man—most of the Junction girls like to see him at the station."

"And you will not be sorry to part with him?"

"I should be very glad," she answered, frankly.

"It has struck me that a few of the young ladies in your position are fond of attention even from men like Young Todd."

"A few, perhaps. But there are not a

few deserving of kind words and honest folk's sympathy."

"I trust so."

"Try to believe so, Major Crawshaw, when you are inclined to be hard in your judgment upon us," she murmured. "Good day."

"Are you going now?"

"Yes, if you will allow me."

"I would not detain you for the world against your will. I am obliged, deeply obliged, by all that you have told me. I—I think you have taught me my duty, instead of my teaching you anything," he said; "may I shake hands with you before I go?"

"Certainly," she answered, putting a little gloved hand in his.

"I shall like to ask you one question, if you will let me?"

She bowed her head in assent.

"Are you satisfied with your position at Battleton Junction?" he inquired. "Would



you not be happier in a different sphere of life ?”

She hesitated for an instant.

“My mother, who was a widow, died suddenly, and left me very poor. I was alone in the world ; and Mr. Freshwater, who is my cousin, told me this was the best that I could do for myself.”

“He’s as big a liar as Young Todd !” cried the Major. “You haven’t been happy in a berth of this kind—you !—it’s impossible.”

“One is never very happy without friends—but,” with a sudden sigh, “I exist ; and I hope for better days.”

“They will come to such as you—better days and truer friends than you have found at Battleton. Good-bye, Miss Daly—God bless you ! if you will allow an old soldier to say so.”

“Thank you,” she murmured in reply.

Major Crawshaw raised his hat with much formality, and to a considerable height, and

then strutted away like a man at the head of his regiment—and Ruth Daly went slowly and thoughtfully homewards.

## CHAPTER V.

## THAT DESIGNING MAJOR !

**M**AJOR CRAWSHAW took his nephew to town with him the very next morning. By what inducements or terrible threats the young gentleman was persuaded or forced to accompany his relative matters not to the purport of our story ; certain it is that Young Todd was borne off to London to spend a few days with the Major, in that officer's snug chambers in the Albany, and that the days lengthened into weeks and the weeks into months before he was back again at Battleton. Meanwhile Young Todd was launched, possibly hurled, into society,

which he took to readily after his first dip, the Major having been wise enough to discover for him somewhere one or two congenial souls partial to billiards and tobacco smoke—young fellows with no starch in them, but sons of old friends with nice sisters shimmering in the background somewhere, and destined to burst presently upon the enraptured gaze of Todd, as the artful Major very well knew, and even had designed from the first. Sisters with money, too, some of them—one with immense expectations, but with the slight drawback of a wen behind the ear, but for all that, and as aforesaid, an extremely nice girl, and, under the circumstances, not too proud to turn aside from Young Todd's attentions, which became manifest by slow degrees, and after he had heard about the property.

When he returned to Battleton he was still a free man, however; he had not acted precipitately; he was taking time to consider his future course, he thought, and he

had an idea in his mind that it would be "jolly," after all this society, to see Miss Daly again for a little while. Herein he was disappointed, for Miss Daly was not to be seen at the refreshment counter, and Battleton Junction folk knew her no more. She had vanished away, and the young ladies behind the pork pies and the sandwiches did not know what had become of her. They were not even curious as to what had become of her, and Miss Racket was rude enough to add, "And a good job too," when she informed Mr. Todd somewhat spitefully that Miss Daly had withdrawn from service at the refreshment buffet for ever—that she had gone, "oh! goodness knows how long," and she was not the only one who thought it was a fair rid-dance of a stuck-up young person. There was a Miss Creasy in her place, a very large young woman, with a pair of fat, rosy cheeks, and a tower of false yellow hair, with a gold arrow and a ribbon in it; but

Mr. Todd did not like the look of Miss Creasy, and faded from her and the Battleton girls altogether after this. He went back to London and to the lady with the wen, and to his uncle, to whom he said not a word concerning Ruth Daly's disappearance from the Junction counter, keeping that little fact to himself for a reason which he could have hardly explained had he been called upon to do so. He liked to keep things to himself, did Master Todd—nature had not endowed him with a capacious or communicative soul, which was nature's fault, of course, and not his own. He had a faint notion that his uncle would have been very glad to hear that Miss Daly had "got the sack," and so he would not tell his uncle that she had gone. It was Young Todd's way, and it saved unpleasant comments, at any rate. His uncle might have said with Miss Racket, "And a good job too," and, at all events, Major Crawshaw should not have the opportunity of saying it

before one who had been more "dreadful spoons" on Miss Daly than he had ever cared to confess.

And was it absolutely certain that Major Crawshaw was not aware of Miss Daly's departure from Battleton, or did that able and indefatigable old soldier know more of that young lady's movements than his nephew? For Major Crawshaw was not of a communicative disposition any more than Young Todd was; he was "sly," at all events, in this matter of the barmaid, though it was for Young Todd's good, and Miss Daly's, that he should keep things to himself, and a cloud for ever between them. There was no stability in Young Todd, no respect for those beneath him in social position, no real love in his entire system, and, hang it, little Ruth Daly was too good for the lout altogether. Miss Daly, thought the Major, was a clever and sensible little woman, with her pretty head screwed on the right way, and with less infernal nonsense about her than

he had discovered yet in any woman, and he respected Miss Daly, because she was a girl who knew how to respect herself. He told Mr. Freshwater this at the Extra-national Hotel, S.W.—Javelins and Freshwater's new and colossal speculation at Lambeth Bridge—where, oddly enough, Miss Daly was to be found in the post of cashier and book-keeper, a piece of promotion which Mr. Freshwater had considered himself justified in offering to Miss Daly after a little quiet talk, of which Miss Daly was not aware, between Major Crawshaw and his speculative self.

Miss Daly was surprised one morning to find Major Crawshaw being shown into her own little counting-house, some three or four months after their last interview at Battleton.

"Here's a gentleman I think you know, Miss Daly," said Mr. Freshwater, as the Major made his best bow and shook hands with her.



"The Major," Miss Daly exclaimed—"I forget your name—but Mr. Todd's uncle, is it not?"

Major Crawshaw coughed as Mr. Freshwater took his departure. It is not pleasant for one's name to be forgotten, and to stand a witness to a short-memored individual's struggles to recall it, and he told her his name again with a grim survey of her. Mr. Todd's uncle, too!—what a terrible way of recollecting a man, and a Major!

"How strange you should find me here—that Mr. Freshwater——"

Major Crawshaw hastened to explain.

"Not at all strange," he said, quickly; "I dine here very frequently—there are more life and bustle than at my club—club very old-fashioned now, and half my friends away at the war, and so on—and Javelins and Freshwater are excellent caterers to the British public—and one gets something to eat that is decent—and here I am."

"Yes; but how did you know I was in the counting-house department?"

"Oh!" said the Major, reddening, "a chance word or two with Ditchwater—Freshwater, I mean—about his management, and his finance, and his book-keeping, and he said he found that ladies made excellent clerks, and he could trust the books of the Extra-national to Miss Daly, and then I said naturally, 'What Miss Daly?—not from Battleton, surely?' and surely it was! I hope you are very well."

"I am very well, thank you," replied Miss Daly, regarding him thoughtfully, even critically.

"I am very pleased to hear it. This is an agreeable change of life from the Junction refreshment counter."

"It is harder work here," said Miss Daly, "there is more responsibility and less amusement."

"Oh, dear! why, you don't mean to say—"

"No, I don't say anything," replied Miss

Daly, with a smile, as if enjoying Major Crawshaw's surprise, "only that I prefer my rise in life to the Junction, and that I am indebted to Mr. Freshwater for his confidence in me."

"Yes, yes—exactly," said the Major, "and I am sure you were never fit for the counter, and feeding the savages and cads in front of it—a false position, young lady—a totally false position, I assure you."

"You must not be too hard upon my class, Major. You remember?"

"How you took me to task?" he replied. "I should think I did remember that. I—I admired—but there, you don't like compliments."

"No."

"And you are very busy."

"Yes, I am rather busy just now."

"I would not disturb you for the world," said Major Crawshaw, "but I thought I should like to see you again for a few minutes, after Freshwater had told me that

it was the real Miss Daly in office here. It was like coming to see an old friend. 'Perhaps you would like to see Miss Daly,' Freshwater said to me just now, and 'By Jove! I should,' I told him. And that is the reason for my troubling you."

"No trouble at all," said Miss Daly, smiling again, and taking up her pen, at which significant hint he turned to go away, holding out his hand once more to her after a moment's hesitation.

"Good evening," he said.

"Good evening, Major."

"You—you don't ask after my nephew?" he said, "what has become of him, whether I am doing my duty by him, and looking after him, as you advised me to do?"

"He is well, I hope?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"I thought he was. I see him very often, and he appears to possess all his old health and spirits."

"Good God! has he found you out,

then?" exclaimed the Major. "The artful scamp, he has never told——"

"He has not seen me," said Miss Daly, demurely; "but through these wire blinds I see him very frequently coming up the steps to luncheon with his friends. I am glad he is well."

"Humph—yes—exactly—so we all are glad," muttered the Major; "but, if he finds you out here, he will be very much astonished and delighted, I—I am afraid."

"Afraid!" murmured Miss Daly.

"Yes—because—but there, I cannot help your meeting—I don't know that I should try, if I thought—dash it! good evening, Miss Daly, good evening."

Major Crawshaw strode away in a condition very much perturbed, and the Extra-national Hotel, S.W., echoed not with his martial tread for many a day afterwards.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A CRISIS.

TWO months had gone by before Major Crawshaw entered the huge caravan-sary again. It was six in the evening when he commenced his dinner there ; it was half past eight ere he had finished his last glass of claret over which he had brooded in a strange, melancholy fashion. It was a quarter to nine, p.m., when he took the liberty of proceeding to the counting-house, which Miss Daly was thinking of closing for the night as he appeared.

“Good evening, Miss Daly ; I trust you will excuse so late a visitor.”

“Certainly, Major.”

They shook hands together, and then Ruth Daly asked if he had been in the country, or abroad.

"Why should you think that?" he asked, almost peremptorily.

"I thought you dined here very frequently—at least, I understood you to say so," remarked Miss Daly.

"I did say so; I used to dine here very frequently," said the Major; "but I have altered my habits lately."

"Indeed."

"Besides," he added, with a suddenness which made Miss Daly jump, "I did not want to be a spy again upon you and my nephew. I—I thought that if he chose to come here, and had made up his mind to come here, I had better keep away, and leave you to yourselves."

"That was very kind," said Miss Daly, quietly; "but his mamma and sisters would have been very much alarmed, and not at all obliged to you."

"I don't care," said the Major, bluffly.

"Oh ! but you did care once."

"I'm not afraid now of your making a fool of my nephew, or of my nephew being able to make a fool of you," he said ; "and it has struck me that, if he were really in love with you, he could not have a more sensible wife, and the sooner you settle the matter the better, if it's coming round to that. There !"

"Thank you," said Miss Daly.

"And if he *has* said anything to you—he's infernally sly, and I can't make him out at all—I should like——"

"I have not spoken to Mr. Todd. That gentleman does not know I am at the Extra-national," interrupted Miss Daly. •

"Not yet !" exclaimed the Major ; "and you don't want him to know, perhaps ?"

"I should leave at once, if he knew I was here, and if he became as foolish a fellow as he was at the Junction," replied Miss Daly, firmly.



“I thought of telling him you were here. I——”

“If you do, I will never speak to you again,” cried Miss Daly.

The Major looked astonished; but he took her hand, promised not to tell Young Todd, hoped he had not offended her, and went his way.

He came very regularly to the Extranational after this; he altered his habits again; he was evidently a man accustomed to change his mind, thought Miss Daly. The Old Cronies' Club, Pall Mall, saw very little of him once more; its peace and rest, its capacious arm-chairs in the smoke-room, its snug dining-room where the viands were to his taste, and the waiters not hungry for fees, were all deserted for the stir and bustle of the flash establishment at Lambeth Bridge, and the mixed assembly which poured into its mammoth dining-room every evening at six, and talked and laughed loudly, and took too much wine at dinner,

and went out red-faced and staring into the streets.

The Major did not speak to Miss Daly on every occasion that he patronized the Extra-national ; on the contrary, he kept his distance to an inordinate extent, and was content with a "good evening" once a week. He knew she was in the counting-house—safe in the counting-house—and that no Young Todd was hanging about the doors, and that was enough for him, and his purpose. For his purpose, thought Miss Daly a little indignantly now and then, was to keep his eye upon her, to suspect her ; his mission in life was to keep guard on his nephew and herself, despite all that she had said. As if she were not to be believed and trusted ; as if he had any right to watch her in this odd, meaningless fashion ; as if it answered any good purpose, or would have been of any use, had she been disposed to assert her rights, and elude his old-fashioned vigilance. And yet he was not a spy, and

scarcely acting like one. He had expressed his horror of playing the spy even, and seemed an earnest, thoughtful, grave gentleman at most times ; she wondered why he came so often to the Extra-national, for she was sure he did not like the hotel, and she could not understand why he put himself out of the way so frequently to exchange a few words with Mr. Freshwater. She was also sure that he did not like Mr. Freshwater, whose manners were obtrusive and "loud," and whose head had been not a little turned by the success of his mammoth establishment. The major wished to be certain that his nephew was not hovering about still ; otherwise there seemed no valid reason why he should take so much pains to render himself uncomfortable.

One day he came to the hotel before eleven in the morning dressed in a new surtout coat, with a flower in his button-hole, and a hat so glossy that he might have shaved himself in it. He had a sherry and

bitters at a side bar, and then marched to the counting-house "as if the place belonged to him," said the head-waiter to a subordinate.

"Do you know what to-day is, Miss Daly?" he inquired.

"Tuesday, is it not?"

"Tut, tut; I mean, what auspicious day?"

"N—no," said Miss Daly, then she looked at his new coat and shiny hat, and thought he was going to be married, and had called at the hotel for some Dutch courage, *en route*. She felt sorry he was "caught," and sure in her heart that it was by a designing widow with money in the funds, and some half-a-dozen grown-up sons and daughters, by way of family encumbrances.

"I am going to a wedding."

"Indeed!"

"My nephew's wedding. Mr. Todd enters the holy state this morning. I am his best man."

He watched her very closely with his

clear grey eyes fixed upon her face, and Ruth Daly objected to his stare, and felt herself reddening beneath his gaze.

"This is a surprise," she remarked.

"Yes. He is married this morning," he said, in a tone almost too triumphant to please Miss Daly. It seemed to say, "I have won the game; you are out of the reckoning at last, and there's an end of it, and you."

"I hope he has made a wise choice," she added.

"I think so. She is not a chit of a girl, but a woman of mind, who will look after him, and the money she brings him."

"You are satisfied?"

"Perfectly satisfied."

"That is all right, then," she answered, in so dry a tone that he looked at her very sharply.

"I suppose you think that, when I am satisfied, everybody ought to be, Miss

Daly?" he said—"or, rather, you think that *I* think so."

Miss Daly laughed.

"I cannot say I have considered the matter very deeply," she replied; "on the contrary, my thoughts have been wandering somewhat strangely."

"In what direction, may I ask?"

"In yours."

"My dear young lady," he exclaimed, eagerly, "what do you mean? Did you say in mine?"

"When you asked me what auspicious day this was, I thought you were going to your own wedding," she said.

The Major stared harder than ever, and his lower jaw dropped on to his satin stock. He took his new hat off, brushed it the wrong way with his coat-sleeve, and then put it carefully on again.

"God bless my soul! what an extraordinary thought!" he said.

"Not very extraordinary, surely."

"That anyone should think—that *you* should think I was going to be married this morning! Dear me! I wish you were not troubled with such silly ideas, Miss Daly."

"Silly!"

"I would have preferred your thinking I was going to be hanged," he said, tetchily, as he walked away in great haste.

"Cross old bachelor!" said Miss Daly, with a pout, as she turned to her books; "it is as well, for the lady's sake, that you are not going to be married, Major Crawshaw!"

And certainly Major Crawshaw was not particularly amiable on his nephew's wedding-day; he scowled at the ministers—there were three divines to tie up Young Todd and his bride securely; he prompted Young Todd in his responses in an unnecessarily high key; he swore profanely at the beadle on the church steps for getting in his way and tumbling over him, in undue haste

to participate in the general distribution of fees; and at the wedding breakfast he was graver and grimmer than befitted the occasion. He was very thoughtful also, and made but a clumsy, spluttering speech in return for some one proposing the bridegroom's relatives, and sat down disturbed in temper afterwards at his own miserable failure.

"I was never so embarrassed in my life, Sarah," he said to his sister, who was sitting at his side, a resplendent being in purple velvet. "That fellow ought to have been shot for lugging in such a toast as that—ridiculous!"

"I don't think you are quite well this morning," remarked Dowager Mrs. Todd.

"I was never better in my life."

"You seem a little out of sorts."

"I don't know what you mean," growled the Major, "but I'm in sorts—heaps of them."

"Ah, well! we have you to thank for



all this happiness," said his sister, in a low tone; "for if it had not been for your coming down to Battleton, and taking Edwin back to town, who could tell what might have happened?"

The Major coughed in his throat, but made no reply.

"Poor Edwin would have been snapped up by that dreadful barmaid. You may depend upon it, she was more than a match for my dear boy, and she meant to have run away with him."

"She never intended anything of the sort."

"Rupert! how do you know?" exclaimed his sister—"how can you tell?"

"She was worth half a dozen of your cub!" he cried; "she would not have looked at him—she would not have had him for twenty times his money! There is nothing like design about Miss Daly."

"I cannot understand how you—" began

his sister, when he snapped off her conjecture half way.

"Nobody says you do understand—don't try," he cried. "Miss Daly is a lady and a—a friend of mine, and I'm not going to sit here and hear her abused; it is not likely."

"A friend of yours, Rupert?—did you say a friend?"

"Yes, I did say a friend."

"Bless me, you know her, then! Well," with a deep breath, "I—I hope she is not setting her cap at you instead of my boy, for she must be a really dangerous young person."

"Don't talk nonsense!"

"But you are a man of the world, and not likely, at your age, to be led away easily."

"Never mind about my age, Sarah; what the devil is my age to do with it!" he said, in the same suppressed and hasty key.

"There are old fools as well as young ones, I suppose."

"But you are not an old fool," replied his sister, drily.

"Yes, I am; I'm an old fool to think that—will you oblige me, sister, by dropping this ridiculous conversation and asking Mr. Pepps to pass the champagne? Thank you."

"What are you going to do?"

"Propose the health of old fools in general," he answered, curtly; and then he rose and gave the health of the clergy and the officiating ministers, which was very remarkable. Yes, he was in a bad temper that morning, and his sister's allusion to his age, had not tended to improve it. He could not forget *that* remark—people over the boundary line will take allusions to their years with a spasm, and it's the one rule without an exception.

"I was asked this morning if this were my wedding-day," he said, later on, to his

sister, when the guests were dispersing, "so I cannot be looking so deucedly old, Sarah."

"Far too old to be thinking of your wedding-day now, Rupert, I should think," replied Mrs. Todd, who would have been extremely sorry for her brother's marriage, and the legacies floating away from her and her children.

"Much you know about that."

They were the Major's last words that afternoon, and they oppressed and discomfited Mrs. Todd. She remembered them too; they rose vividly before her again a few months afterwards, and she could only sigh and say, "I thought as much," adding in moments more bitter, "that there was no trusting any man."

Major Crawshaw dined at the Extra-national that evening; he went straight to the Extra-national, in fact, despite his bad temper, and his bad appetite after a heavy luncheon. He saw Miss Daly after dinner that even-

ing; he strolled into the counting-house, and told her all the news, but she did not appear to be greatly interested, and even answered sometimes in monosyllables when he waited for the answer which he thought his observations required.

Miss Daly was also "out of sorts" that evening, as his sister would have said; he missed the bright, frank smile which was natural to her, and the steadfast look from the eyes was no longer for him; she hardly glanced up once from her ledgers.

The distant manner of Miss Daly troubled the Major more than he could account for; it was evident that in some way or other he had given her offence, unless—and this was the horrid thought which damped and disheartened him—she was grieving that Young Todd was for ever set apart from her. Had she disguised her emotion so completely as to deceive him in this way? Was it possible that he had been so grievously mistaken in his estimate of her character?

He went away disconsolately. Twice that day had he gone from the Extra-national with a heart exceedingly heavy ; what a trouble and nuisance at his years to let the words or the manner of a girl—a mere child—affect him in this unaccountable way. What was the use of it? What was he thinking about?

Was he thinking too much of Ruth Daly then?—a young woman who could never think anything of him—who thought so little of him, in fact, that only that morning she had asked if it was his wedding-day? Strong evidence that she could not have had him on her mind—of course, that was not likely, he being on his way to fifty, and growing iron grey. He had never paid her any attention, for that matter, and as for “making eyes,” that process was for lunatics under twenty, or fools who went on their way unblushingly and in a chronic state of leer. Ah! yes, he was a failure, his scheming had been a failure too, and

she had loved Young Todd after all. Or, if it were impossible to love that youth—and, upon his soul, he thought it *was* impossible—then she was worldly and selfish, and was regretting now the chance which she had let slip by her reserve. She had been quietly waiting for Young Todd, making sure of his coming presently, and to be disappointed at last had been more than she could disguise.

Well, he was sorry—he was vexed—and he brooded till a late hour upon the whole position, and went to bed shrugging his shoulders at the weakness of women, which he had done all his life, for that matter, before he had met Miss Daly.

Nevertheless, Major Crawshaw did not give up the *Extra-national*—he should do so by-and-by, but he did not care to part with Miss Daly on bad terms, and he thought he should prefer their final meeting to be pleasant and friendly, so that there might be a fair reminiscence of her for ever after-

wards in his memory. Confound it! he was getting an old fool—his sister was right in her fancy. He was softening with uncommon rapidity.

Miss Daly continued grave and distant in her manner, almost as if she owed him a grudge. She was always terribly busy with those abominable account books, and would not look at him, except when he entered the counting-house, and then it was with so much calm surprise at his appearance—at his impudence in intruding upon the private apartments of the Extra-national, perhaps—that the poor Major was fairly bewildered and discomfited.

He had it out at last, though—the reader is aware he plumed himself on being straightforward.

“Miss Daly,” he said one morning, “in what way have I offended you?”

“I have not said you have given me offence,” was the slow reply. “I have no right possibly to take offence.”



"But still you are offended, and you are too truthful a girl to deny it."

"And you too clear-sighted a man not to know what is the cause," said Ruth Daly, facing him suddenly.

The Major turned red and then pale. In all his life he had never felt in a more awkward position; but he acted as a gentleman should to a pretty woman. He gave in, and acknowledged his transgression without attempting an excuse.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Daly, and I am very sorry."

There was so sorrowful an expression on the warrior's face that Miss Daly was softened at once. This was real contrition.

"Very sorry?" she repeated.

"Very."

"Then I forgive you, Major, if a poor girl's forgiveness is of any value to you."

She held her hand towards him, and was surprised to find that his was trembling.

"You will not let this happen again, will you?" she said.

"Happen again! What do you say?"

"You know—you understand."

"Of course I had no idea that you were fond of him. You did not let me into that secret, Miss Daly," he stammered forth, "or you would have found me still your friend. But as to this happening again——"

The hand was instinctively withdrawn; the eyes became larger and more luminous.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, in fresh amazement.

"About Young Todd," he answered, "of course."

"I'm not thinking about Young Todd," cried Ruth Daly, with a pretty little petulant outburst that really became her. "I never have thought about him. What has he been to me but a nuisance?"

"You don't say so! I am glad—I—— Well, then, what is the matter? What *have* I done?"

"You don't know? Oh! Major Crawshaw, what is the use of playing the hypocrite, and playing it so badly!"

"I play the hypocrite!" he exclaimed. "For Heaven's sake, girl, tell me what is my offence?"

Ruth Daly looked at him again sharply and steadfastly, but the bright grey eyes of the soldier did not flinch. He had had only one idea as to the cause of Miss Daly's reserve, and, this being dismissed, he was utterly lost. There was no time to consider a fresh cause of grievance at this juncture.

"You have a very bad memory," she said. "Try to think why I am here—and who put me here."

"Oh!" said the Major, recollecting on the instant.

"It was you who persuaded Mr. Freshwater to appoint me as book-keeper—it was you who persuaded him—who offered to pay my salary even, if he would allow it,

or thought I was not worth the money—and I—I fancied all the time it was my own wonderful talents which had set me in this place. You have robbed me of my independence by this—you have lowered me in my self-esteem.”

“I wished to get you away from Battleton.”

“At any cost—yes,” and the tears were swimming in her eyes as she spoke, “but it was for your nephew’s sake.”

“Pardon me, Miss Daly, but it was for your own,” said the Major. “I wished to rescue you from a false position—to place you in a different sphere, where, at least, you should not be exposed to the vulgar attentions of the snob. I wanted you to be something better than a barmaid, and I—I certainly told Mr. Freshwater you deserved to be.”

“And he took your hint, as you were likely to be a good customer,” she said, satirically, “as you had influence and many

friends. But what could he have thought of me?"

"Thought! If he has ever had a thought of you in any way disparaging, I'll knock his ugly head off—by gad I will!" exclaimed the Major, warmly.

"Oh! he has been very kind in his way—and I do not think I have served him very badly—but I must leave the Extra-national."

"My dear young lady," he added, with a jerk, "you will never be so precipitate—you——"

"I have already given Mr. Freshwater notice to withdraw," said Miss Daly, interrupting him.

"Because I asked him to place you here?"

"Yes."

The Major looked still more mournfully at her.

"I suppose it's a proper pride—I don't know," he said, helplessly; "I cannot blame

you, and yet I think you are acting very rashly, and upon my honour," he blurted forth, "you are making me very miserable."

"You! Why?"

"Because all this is my fault—because, Miss Daly," he said, suddenly, "there is another reason why I placed you here which no one knows but myself. You may as well have the whole truth whilst I am about it, and then you can laugh at me thoroughly some day."

Miss Daly did not laugh; on the contrary, she turned very white, guessing the whole truth at once.

"Pray don't say any more," she urged.

"Only that I love you, Miss Daly," said the impetuous Major, "and have loved you in my quiet, old-fashioned way ever since I spoke to you on that Sunday morning down in Battleton. Very ridiculous of me, you will think, at my age; but I could not help it, Miss Daly. My life seemed very dull

and lonely after I had known you, and there was a hope even that you might in time learn to care for me a little. There, that's the truth; now I will wish you good day, and take the liberty of saying God bless you."

He held both his hands towards her, but she did not see them for the mist before her eyes. He stooped and looked more closely into her face, and saw that she was crying.

"Miss Daly, forgive me if——"

"Go now. You are very kind—there is nothing more—to forgive—I—I—please go now, Major, for my sake, will you not?"

Still he made no haste to leave her, being too much of a gentleman to leave her in tears. There was a softness in her voice, too, that told him he had not offended her anew; there came even a new hope to him.

"Ruth," he exclaimed, "if I might only think you would learn to like me in time—that I was not too old for you—or too much of a bear—or—or——"

"You will go now, Major," she entreated, putting her hand in his, "you will give me time to think of this—a little time to consider all you have said. It is like a dream to me at present."

"Not a bad dream—not quite a nightmare, Miss Daly. Say that."

"No," she murmured, with her head averted from him.

"And when will you give me an answer?" he asked—"to-morrow?"

"In a fortnight's time."

"Great Heaven! what an age of suspense!"

"I am bewildered—I did not think—I could not believe—I—Major, *will* you go?" she said, almost angrily in her excitement.

"Certainly. Good day—good-bye, Miss Ruth; I am going immediately."

And he marched away hurriedly. He was seen no more for a fortnight at the Extra-national; he was a brave man, but he had not the courage to appear until his time



of suspense was over. And it had been a great suspense, cowering in the shadows of his rooms in the Albany a nervous, dispirited man, and no one save himself knew what a dreary, dreadful time of probation it was. He had set his heart on Ruth Daly, and it was a heart with one idea to distract it, in its sober middle age. Had he been a younger man, or a man more frivolous, he might have laughed himself out of this in a fortnight; but life had never been a laughing matter with him, and this love was more than a jest.

Miss Daly received him with a sad smile that dropped him to zero, but he was mistaken in his fears. She was very happy now; she had made up her mind to say "yes;" she knew with whom she might trust the happiness of her life, and whom it would not be difficult to love, even if she did not love him already. She accepted him, and never repented marrying a man old enough

to be her father. Very remarkable, but people don't occasionally.

The good folk in Battleton, who relied on the Major's dying like a bachelor and a gentleman, and leaving his worldly goods among them all, were very much shocked at first; but they recovered by degrees, all but Young Todd, who never forgave his uncle, married and settled though he was for himself.

"It was a deuced shabby trick," he said once, late at night, and after a glass of whisky and water, to which he clung, for old associations' sake, "to get me away from the girl, and then marry her bang off when my back was turned. And little Daly might have known better—ah! and done better, too," he added, complacently; "she had one good chance for herself at the Junction, but she let it go by. Just like a woman that was!"









